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Al-Ahram Weekly

No 363 الاهرام ويكلي

Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875

5 - 11 February 1998 | 18 Pages | P.T.75



Samir Sarhan, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10

Compromise!

IRAQ is prepared to allow international arms inspectors "comprehensive access" to eight disputed presidential sites, Cable News Network (CNN) reported yesterday.

Quoting unnamed sources, CNN said the inspections would be allowed for a period of around one month and, for reasons of national sovereignty, would be termed "visits" not inspections.

Under the Iraqi proposal, each of the 15 members of the UN Security Council would appoint five inspectors, plus two more appointed by the 21 countries on the UN Special Commission [UNSCOM] in charge of disarming Iraq, CNN said.

Inspectors would be allowed free access to the presidential sites and could bring with them X-ray, infra-red or any other equipment needed to carry out their duties.

The report could not be confirmed immediately. CNN said Iraq advanced a similar proposal to the Security Council in November but received no response.

'Severe blow'

ANY new US attack on Iraq will be more serious than others mounted since the Gulf War and deal a severe blow to Iraq's ability to threaten its neighbours, US Defence Secretary William Cohen said on Tuesday.

Cohen, speaking to Congress after Washington warned that time was running out for a diplomatic solution, said any attack would be aimed at preventing President Saddam Hussein "from reconstituting his [chemical and biological weapons] capability in the near future at least..."

Cohen said any attack from the formidable US force assembled in the Gulf would be aimed at ensuring Saddam was unable to "pose any kind of a threat to his neighbours".

Retaliation

ISRAELI Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu refused to assure the United States that Israel will not retaliate for a possible Iraqi attack, the newspaper *Haaretz* said yesterday.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's request for restraint came in a weekend meeting with the Israeli leader, the newspaper said.

Netanyahu's adviser David Bar-Illan said Albright requested that Israel "keep a low profile verbally," but that he did not believe a request was made not to retaliate for an attack.

Envoys

FRANCE'S special envoy Bertrand Dufourcq and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvalyuk held talks in Baghdad yesterday as part of their efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the Iraqi crisis.

The two envoys met at Dufourcq's hotel, ahead of a meeting between the French emissary and President Saddam Hussein aimed at persuading him to allow UN arms inspectors into presidential palaces.

Cook in Gulf

BRITISH Foreign Secretary Robin Cook announced he will visit Saudi Arabia and Kuwait today to explain British determination, by negotiation or military strikes, to force Iraq to back down over UN weapons inspections.

Yeltsin warns

RUSSIAN President Boris Yeltsin warned US President Bill Clinton yesterday that he might provoke a world war if the Americans used force against Iraq.

"By his actions, Clinton might run into a world war. He is acting too loudly," the Interfax news agency quoted Yeltsin as saying in the Kremlin.

War?

Cairo worked feverishly to prevent yet another Gulf War, but Washington seemed determined to let "all hell break loose" in the region

In what appeared to be a last-ditch effort to forestall an imminent military strike against Iraq, President Hosni Mubarak, in his capacity as head of the Arab Summit Conference, dispatched Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid to Baghdad yesterday to urge the Iraqi government to comply with Security Council resolutions and to cooperate with UN weapons' inspection teams.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's tour of the region this week seemed to confirm that Washington was no longer talking in terms of if, but how and when a military strike against Iraq would be conducted. Albright's final stopover in Cairo on Tuesday for talks with President Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa did not reassure Cairo as to American intentions. "This time things look and sound different from the last stand-off [in November of last year]. This time the Americans seem more determined to take the road of military action. Their tone is entirely different," an informed source told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Cairo, extremely disturbed by the prospect of a military strike against Iraq at a time when the peace process has all but been declared dead, has been engaged in relentless diplomatic activities to prevent it. President Mubarak consulted with over a dozen Arab leaders during the week, before dispatching Abdel-Meguid to Baghdad.

"We are asking the Iraqis to comply with the UN Security Council resolutions," Mubarak told reporters yesterday. "It's very important. Otherwise the situation will be very serious."

Asked about Abdel-Meguid's mission to Baghdad, Mubarak responded: "I asked Abdel-Meguid to tell them to avoid the serious reactions, serious consequences, — that he [Saddam Hussein] should comply with the UN resolutions. Otherwise, the situation will be very dangerous."

Replying to a question as to whether the idea of organising an Arab summit was on the table, Mubarak said: "Not yet, we have not so far discussed this with the Arab leaders."

Presidential adviser Osama El-Baz, in statements to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, disclosed that Mubarak had sent a verbal message to Saddam Hussein last Sunday and received a reply on the following day. He said Mubarak sent a second message to Saddam yesterday.

El-Baz said that the "thrust of Abdel-Meguid's talks in Baghdad is to prevent the use of force because the consequences can only be destructive for Iraq, the Iraqi people and the entire region."

Explaining the Egyptian position, El-Baz said, however, that Egypt "had not advised Iraq to open the presidential palaces for inspection because this would set a serious international precedent. What we advised them to do is to allow the inspectors to resume their activities, to think twice before rejecting any request and not to take issue with the nationalities of the inspectors, because that is an auxiliary matter."

Secretary of State Albright, during a tour of the region this week, attempted to drum up support for a US military strike, should diplomacy fail.

Following visits to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain, Albright said the US "has all the cooperation we need" from the Gulf states, but she faced opposition in Cairo.

Following talks with President Hosni Mubarak Tuesday evening, Albright emerged in the company of a sombre-faced Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. He told reporters that "all options are still on the table" but affirmed "full support" for the ongoing diplomatic efforts. Moussa also said that Iraq's compliance "would really help spare us the grave consequences we all want to avoid."

Egypt's concern runs deep. Public opinion in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world would not tolerate an extensive military strike against Iraq by the US, and probably other Western allies "at a time when [Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin] Netanyahu is showing not the slightest respect for his peace commitments," an official source said. He added: "It is a very alarming situation... no one can predict the repercussions of this strike; the Iraqis could well retaliate by striking against Israel; Israel would strike back and the Palestinians, already suffering greatly under Israeli occupation, would rise up; all hell would break loose."

At her joint press conference with Moussa in Cairo, Albright said that "if diplomacy fails, the sole responsibility for the grave consequences that will follow will lie at the door of the government of Iraq." She added that although the US "prefers" a diplomatic solution, "if we do take military action, it will be significant and it will be very clear that Saddam Hussein will have been thwarted."

Albright was told in Cairo that a military strike would not accomplish much because it would not guarantee Iraqi compliance with Security Council resolutions. Moreover, it would cause great embarrassment to Washington's Arab allies, particularly those involved in Arab-Israeli peace-making.

Egyptian officials also explained their concern over the inclination of some members of the UNSCOM mission to be too free in their reading of the mission's prerogatives as stipulated in the relevant UN resolutions. Chief Inspector Richard Butler's provocative statement suggesting that Iraq has enough mass destruction weapons to destroy Tel Aviv, was cited as a case in point.

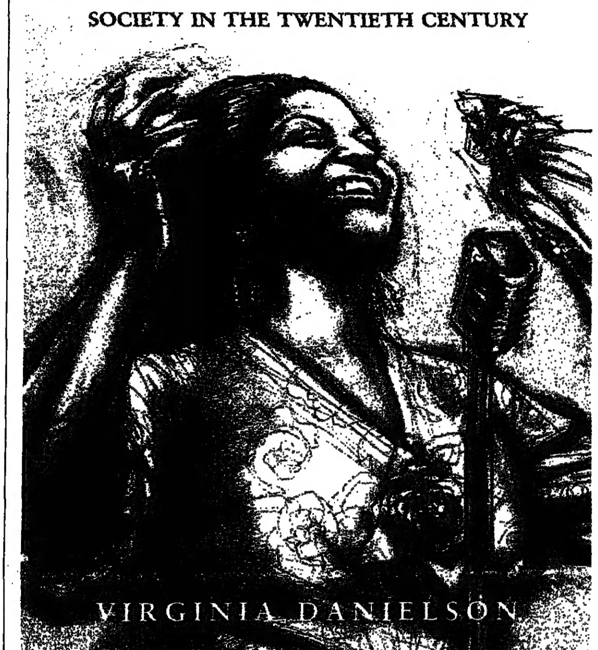
On her way back, Albright told reporters aboard her plane that Arab leaders were prepared to acquiesce in US military action if diplomacy failed.

However, the US president could do worse than listen to the warning note struck by presidential adviser El-Baz in his statements to the *Weekly*. "The Americans and the West seem to feel that Arab rulers can divorce themselves from Arab public opinion, which rejects a military strike against Iraq. There is not a single Arab leader or Arab people who wants a strike against Iraq, not even Kuwait, its leaders or its people." *(see pp.2,3&4)*

*Reported by **Dina Ezzat**, **Galal Nassar** and **Nevine Khalil***

The Voice of Egypt

UMM KULTHŪM, ARABIC SONG, AND EGYPTIAN SOCIETY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



SINGING HER PRAISE: "Life in the Arab world came to a stop" — when the star sang, of course, but also when she died. On 3 February 1975, millions of Egyptians poured into the streets to express their grief.

Today, as the 30th Cairo International Book Fair opens, Umm Kalthoum fans who never had a chance to listen to the Thursday concerts, broadcast to spellbound listeners all over the Arab world, can glimpse what she meant thanks to Virginia Danielson's new book (University of Chicago Press, 1997).

The "voice of Egypt" is gone, but her songs are still heard: on a purist's CD player, in the rarefied atmosphere of a bourgeois living room, or over the crackly speaker of a rickety taxi radio. Fans can listen intently in cafés dedicated to her memory, or hear a snatch of unforgettable melody drifting out of a carpentry workshop.

Umm Kalthoum is Egypt, of course; but, although her listeners may try to recapture the poignant celebration of her songs, and indeed do recreate her every day, things will never be quite the same. *(see pp. 3, 13)*

Bridging the nuclear gap

With Argentinian help, Egypt is launching its first high-capacity nuclear reactor in more than 30 years. Omayma Abdel-Latif reports



Outline of the control system

After an interruption that lasted for three decades, Egypt is moving ahead again with a new programme for the peaceful applications of nuclear energy.

Speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, nuclear energy officials said the launching of a new reactor "heralded the activation of Egypt's long-delayed programme for using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes."

The new reactor, which was inaugurated yesterday by President Hosni Mubarak and Argentinian President Carlos Menem, is the culmination of a series of agreements signed by the two countries in 1985 to expand cooperation in the field of the peaceful application of nuclear energy.

On the basis of these agreements, a contract was signed in September 1992 to build a 22 megawatt reactor. Work begin a few months later with an Egyptian work force and more than 70 experts who had received training in different fields of nuclear energy in Argentina.

According to project supervisor Ibrahim El-Dakhli, deputy chairman of the Egyptian Atomic Energy Authority, the reactor will be used to produce radioactive isotopes and cobalt used in medical treatment — particularly the treatment of cancer.

Argentina was chosen because of its extensive experience in using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, El-Dakhli said. Work on the reactor was completed four months ahead of schedule, he added.

Egypt acquired its first nuclear reactor from the Soviet Union in 1961. The two megawatt reactor was opened by President Gamal Abdel-Nasser at Inchass, in the Nile Delta. But any Egyptian nuclear ambitions had to be discarded following the 1967 defeat at the hands of Israel.

As a result, Egypt lost many of its nuclear experts who had to travel abroad to seek work opportunities. Some emigrated to Canada and others joined the Iraqi nuclear programme.

Before his assassination in 1981 President Anwar El-Sadat announced plans to build two nuclear power stations along the Mediterranean coast. These plans, though, were subsequently shelved.

Nuclear experts interviewed by the *Weekly* expressed the hope that the reactivation of the Egyptian nuclear programme would gradually bridge the technological gap between Egypt and some of the advanced countries in the region. But they stressed that Egypt was developing its nuclear potential strictly for peaceful applications.

"Egypt has always abided by the safety regulations of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and this new reactor has been visited by IAEA inspectors and classified as adhering to the Agency's system," said Fawzi Hammad, former head of the Atomic Energy Authority. He described the reactor as a "much needed achievement in nuclear technology."

A nuclear official affirmed that the reactor is equipped with an advanced safety system that makes any radioactive leakage almost impossible.

Meanwhile, officials rejected claims by the Israeli press that the reactor would be used for military purposes. "The source of the nuclear threat in this region is coming from one place and that is Israel and it should be stopped," Abdel-Gawad Emara, a nuclear expert, told the *Weekly*.

The officials pointed out that, unlike Israel, Egypt is a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Moreover, Egypt's nuclear facilities — Inchass and any new reactors — will remain open to IAEA inspection while Israel's nuclear programme has always been shrouded in secrecy, the officials said. *(see p.11)*

INSIDE

Egypt's answer is... no

The opposition parties are united, not only amongst themselves, but with the government in their unanimous rejection of an American military strike against Iraq. **Fatemah Farag** takes the political temperature



Khaled Mohieddin   Fouad Serageddin   Mustafa Murad   Ibrahim Shoukry   Diaeddin Dawood

President Hosni Mubarak this week declared Egypt's opposition to any military action against Iraq — a position that reflected popular sentiment and was shared by the opposition political parties.

Declaring that the stand-off between Iraq and the United States should be resolved by diplomatic means, Mubarak sent a message to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, whose contents were not disclosed.

Mubarak also conferred by long-distance telephone with the leaders of 13 Arab states: Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Kuwait, Yemen, Qatar, Bahrain, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya. The objective was to build up a united Arab position calling for a peaceful settlement of the crisis.

Opposition party leaders, holding an emergency meeting on Tuesday, also opposed any strike against Iraq. The leaders "declared their rejection of the American threat to deliver a military blow against Iraq," a joint statement said. "This would be an aggression not only against the Iraqi people but against the entire Arab nation... It would be a turning point in relations between the Arab peoples and the United States, which every day offers fresh evidence of its hostility to the Arabs and its bias in favour of their enemies."

The statement accused the United States of "using double standards, by backing Israel's nuclear, chemical and biological arsenal. This has exposed the ugly face of America," the statement said.

The statement was signed by leaders of the Wafd, Tagammu, Liberal, Nasserist and Labour parties, as well as by a representative of the Communists.

The statement took issue with a threat made by Jesse Helms, chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee, to cut off American aid to Egypt unless it backed the United States in the confrontation with Iraq. This threat "brings America's arrogance to a new peak," the statement said.

"We cannot look at what is happening to Iraq except in the framework of what is happening to other Arab states," said Magdi Hussein of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party. "There are sanctions imposed on Libya and Sudan. Once they are finished with Iraq, it will be Iran's turn and possibly even Egypt's turn."

Hussein Abdel-Razek of the leftist Tagammu Party believes that Egypt should play a leading role in defusing the crisis. "I think that Egypt, along with Syria, has a major role here," because the two countries were members of the military coalition which liberated Kuwait in 1992, he said.

Abdel-Razek stressed the importance of a united Arab position. "There should be Egyptian-Arab coordination with the aim of creating a more effective pressure bloc opposing not only the Americans but the Arab states that implicitly support US policy on Iraq," he said. "Also, we should remember that the joint Arab defence pact, signed in the 1950s, is still valid, and maybe this is the time to re-activate it."

Magdi Hussein underlined the need not only to end the sanctions against Iraq but also to end Iraq's isolation in the Arab world. "The sanctions give the US a pretext to accuse Iraq of being a renegade state," he said. "We must work against this. Also we must send the message to the United States that Iraq is not isolated in the Arab world and that hitting Baghdad will be tantamount to hitting any other Arab capital."

The opposition parties also stress the importance of permitting the free expression of the people's disapproval of American policy, but they believe that the decision to use such a "weapon" rests with the government. "If the political parties are to be effective in this battle, we need to be given the freedom to act," argued Abdel-Razek.

Magdi Hussein pointed out that a team of Egyptian doctors was currently on a visit to Baghdad. The Iraqi capital was visited earlier this year by a delegation of actors and actresses headed by film director Youssef Chahine. "These visits are good examples of solidarity," Hussein commented.

The opposition parties have decided to fax a letter of protest to all the parties concerned, including the US Embassy, and are arranging a prayer in solidarity with the Iraqi people at the Al-Azhar Mosque at noon on Friday 13 February.

Greater democracy urged by parliament

A People's Assembly report affirmed confidence in the cabinet of the prime minister but questioned its position on political reform. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reviews the report's contents

The People's Assembly will begin its annual marathon of parliamentary debates next Monday over the government's policy statement. As many as 350 majority and opposition deputies are expected to take the floor to discuss a 162-page report prepared by a special committee responding to the policy statement delivered by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri to the Assembly on 23 December. The report reviews a number of thorny issues, including the government's battle with terrorism, the exercise of political rights and the economic reform programme.

Although the report urged deputies to affirm confidence in Ganzouri's government, it castigated its policies on political reform, terrorism and corruption.

The report deplored the fact that the Assembly's previous recommendations, underlining the pressing need to introduce a new agenda for political reform, were totally ignored by the government. "The Assembly emphasises again that the scope of the people's exercise of their political rights continues to fall short of the required level. This is manifested by the low turnout of voters in general elections, restrictions on the establishment of political parties and the reluctance of women to participate in political life," the report said.

It reaffirmed that there was a pressing need for a new agenda on political reform. "This agenda should include the strict application of the 1956 law on the exercise of political rights," the report said. "For example, a fine should be imposed on registered voters who fail to vote in elections. Voter-registration lists should be revised and the judiciary's supervision of elections should be expanded to encourage voters to take part in the balloting," the report added. It also urged political parties to "introduce reforms to their internal structures in order to consolidate their roles as political institutions entrusted with raising new generations of political leaders."

Political reform is expected to be a top priority for the opposition in next week's debates. Yassin Serageddin, spokesman of the liberal Wafd Party, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the report's recommendations in this connection are just "talk" because the government has not shown readiness to act. He cited the passing, two weeks ago, of a new companies law which makes the publication of new newspapers conditional on the cabinet's approval. "This law is the prelude to new measures that will end the limited margin of freedom available at present," Serageddin said.

The Wafd, he added, has demanded that the Constitution be amended, restrictions on the establishment of political parties be lifted and a new system of general elections introduced. "These should run parallel with liberalising the press and media in general, especially in giving citizens complete freedom to establish newspapers and television channels," said Serageddin.

Sameh Ashour, the only Nasserist deputy in the Assembly, also accused the government of muzzling public freedoms. "Although the report noted that there is remarkable keenness by professionals and workers to participate in syndicate and trade union elections, it said the government remains determined to be unresponsive in this connection. The government insists on tightening its grip on this essential aspect of political life by placing many bureaucratic obstacles in the way of union and syndicate elections," Ashour said.

Government officials, however, rejected the accusations that the government acted to muzzle political freedoms. Kamal El-Shazli, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, announced that the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) is currently coordinating with the government to amend the 1956 law on the exercise of political rights. Although El-Shazli did not specify the articles that will be modified, he insisted that the government is keen to give adequate attention to the opposition's demands.

The report also addressed the issue of terrorism, urging that security forces show greater efficiency and discipline. "In confronting terrorism, security forces should have respect for the law, human rights and political freedoms," the report said. At the same time, however, it also urged security forces to strike with an "iron fist" against corruption, tax evasion, drug-trafficking and the smuggling into the country of substandard food.

But Serageddin disagreed. The report, he contended, placed the responsibility of combating terrorism and corruption on the shoulders of the security forces alone. "The Wafd Party, however, believes that the growing phenomenon of corruption has fed on shady practices of privatisation policies. Parliament should play a bigger supervisory role in order to uproot this phenomenon," Serageddin said. He said he had recently taken the initiative of drafting a new law for the impeachment of cabinet ministers suspected of illegal practices. "This law is essential for checking the proliferation of corruption among top government officials and their relatives. Citizens want to see the government, if only for once, take a practical step towards ending corruption. Just one time," he said.

But Serageddin did not appear optimistic about the chances of the Assembly approving the draft law. In fact, he expects it to be rejected outright. "Rejection, however, may demonstrate to people that the government talks about fighting corruption, but does not act," he said.

Mexico acts swiftly to apprehend diplomat's murderers

A medical report claiming that an Egyptian diplomat, who was killed by gangsters in Mexico, died of a heart attack has now been changed. The Egyptian ambassador in Mexico City explains to **Ibrahim El-Bahey** how he managed to expose the truth



Mohamed Ismail Sadek

Shortly before sunset on 28 January, Mohamed Ismail Sadek, the second secretary at the Egyptian Embassy in Mexico, was driving with his wife, father and mother along "death road" in the Mexican mountains. The family was on their way to spend the *Eid El-Fitr* holiday at a sea resort, 500km from the Mexican capital. Stones blocked the road and Sadek had to stop.

Gangsters came forward and asked him and his father to get out of the car. They were immediately stripped of their money and valuables. The gangsters then asked his mother and wife to come out. But Sadek told them to stay put.

When the gangsters realised that he was getting ready to defend the two women, they opened fire, fatally wounding him. The arrival of a car, driving in the opposite direction, saved the lives of the three other Egyptians. The gangsters, apparently thinking it was a police car, took to their heels.

With her bleeding husband at her side, and the father and mother in the back seats, Sadek's wife drove the car to the nearest provincial hospital. It was there that Sadek was pronounced dead. But to everybody's surprise, the medical report claimed that he had died of a heart attack.

Infuriated, Egyptian Ambassador Mohamed Derghami contacted Mexican government officials — going as high up as the president and foreign minister, who were attending an economic forum in Switzerland at the time. He pointed out that the fake medical report would have a negative impact on Egyptian-Mexican relations. The president ordered that the report be changed and the truth put on record. He also ordered a federal investigation of the murder, under the control of a federal attorney. The president and foreign minister also conveyed condolences by telephone to the ambassador and to the wife of the murdered diplomat.

The ambassador told *Al-Ahram Weekly* by long-distance telephone that he has been informed by a Mexican prosecutor that authorities have in hand all "the principal threads" that will lead to the assailants. One of them was arrested in a mountain village near the site of the attack, and he informed investigators about two of his accomplices, who were also apprehended, the ambassador said.

"The arrest of the culprits was not an easy or simple matter," Derghami said. "It was the result of round-the-clock efforts and close coordination between the ministries of the interior, defence and health."

At the orders of the defence minister, the mountainous area where the assailants took refuge was combed by air force helicopters, the ambassador added.

Back in Cairo, the diplomat's father, Ismail Sadek, a former ambassador, described the attack as "highway robbery" and said the killing took place in a matter of seconds.

He explained that he was invited by his son to go fishing at a resort overlooking the Pacific Ocean during the *Eid* holiday. As they drove along "death road", the son was warned by some of the locals, but he did not pay attention. As he continued driving, bullets were fired over their heads and then they were forced to stop by the stones blocking the road.

In memoriam

Two former cabinet ministers, a renowned Egyptologist and a respected journalist passed away this week



Hilmi Murad

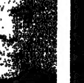




Mamdouh Attiya







Abdel-Sattar El-Tawila



Gamaleddin Mokhtar

Hilmi Murad

Deputy-chairman of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party and former minister of education, died last Friday at the age of 79. Leading officials, writers and members of political parties took part in Saturday's funeral.

Throughout his political career, Murad upheld the ideals of democracy, freedom and human rights. He joined the Misr El-Fatah Party in 1935, playing an active role in the national movement opposing the British occupation of Egypt in the 1940s.

As president of Ain Shams University in 1968, he refused to take action to stop the student demonstrations that broke out following the 1967 defeat, viewing the protests as the students' right to self-expression. He later served briefly as education minister in 1968.

Murad was one of those who worked with Ibrahim Shukri in establishing the Labour Party in 1978 and drawing up its platform. As the party's deputy chairman, he fought many battles against corruption, repression and violation of human rights.

He was also a celebrated economist, the author of several books on economics and a participant in many international political and economic conferences. He was awarded the Order of Merit, First Class, and the State Merit Award in 1974.

Mamdouh Attiya

Former minister of justice and former chief justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court, died last Saturday. Born in 1923, he graduated from the Faculty of Law 20 years later, and went on to pursue post-graduate studies. He worked as state prosecutor and judge and, in 1952, was appointed as counsellor at the Court of Cassation, the nation's highest criminal tribunal.

In 1977, Attiya was appointed minister of justice and, a year later, he became the first chief justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court. He introduced important amendments to the law regulating the functions of the State Council to which administrative courts are affiliated.

Abdel-Sattar El-Tawila

A leftist journalist and an advocate of peace with Israel, died last Saturday at the age of 69 after a long illness. Suffering from liver complications, Tawila travelled to Paris for medical treatment at the government's expense. Following his return a week ago, he went into a coma.

Born in 1928 in the Menufiya Governorate, Tawila graduated from the Faculty of Law, Cairo University. Active in the socialist movement since 1945, Tawila began his journalistic career in the mid-1950s with the weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef* and also contributed to other publications.

Tawila devoted a special column in *Sabah El-Kheir* magazine, *Rose El-Youssef*'s sister publication, to people's problems. He also prepared the material for a television programme called *Kashkoul*.

He came under fire from fellow journalists and intellectuals for his frequent visits to Israel, where he covered Israeli elections and interviewed senior Israeli officials. Throughout his illness, Tawila would not give up but continued writing. He was buried at his birthplace yesterday. A memorial ceremony will be held on Tuesday at El-Hamedeya El-Shazleya Mosque in Cairo's Mohandessin district.

An illustrious career

Gamaleddin Mokhtar

It was with profound sorrow that we learnt of the death of eminent Professor Gamaleddin Mokhtar, a leading Egyptologist and scholar, on Friday, 30 January.

Dr Mokhtar devoted his entire life to the study of archaeology in Egypt. Besides his work in Nubia, Dr Mokhtar's archaeological activities covered many sites in the Nile Valley and in Sinai as well as in the Western Desert. For over 20 years, he also acted as an archaeological consultant to UNESCO.

Born in Alexandria on 14 July 1918, Dr Mokhtar obtained a doctorate degree at Ain Shams University in 1957. He joined the Antiquities' Organisation where he pursued a brilliant career, culminating in his nomination to the organisation's presidency. He held the post from 1967 to 1977, a very critical period during which there was a worldwide campaign to salvage Nubian antiquities threatened by the waters of the Aswan High Dam. With tact and diligence, he supervised and coordinated that extremely complicated operation.

In 1977, at the close of his term of office as president of the Organisation of Antiquities, he accepted a two-year post as professor of archaeology at Riyadh University in Saudi Arabia. After his return to Egypt, he was appointed professor emeritus of Egyptology at Alexandria University (1982-95) and, more recently, at Helwan University.

In recognition of his exemplary performance, Dr Mokhtar was honoured at home and abroad. In Egypt he received the prestigious State Merit Award as well as the Order of Merit, First Class. Internationally, his work was recognised by eminent Egyptologists who presented him with a *Festschrift* in two volumes, published by L'Institut Francis d'Archeologie *Orientale du* Caire in 1985. Dr Mokhtar was, moreover, accorded various honours by France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands.

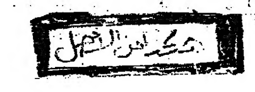
Among his numerous publications were: *The Rameseum and its Documentation*, 1972; *Education in Ancient Egypt* (in collaboration with Ahmed Badawi), 1974; *Encyclopedia of Egyptian Civilisation* (editor), 1977; *A History of Africa, Vol. 2*, for UNESCO.

Dr Mokhtar was a member of several national and international councils and societies, including The Supreme Council of Antiquities, L'Institut de l'Egypte and The Archaeological Society of Alexandria. In addition, he was vice-president of the International Advisory Committee for UNESCO's General History of Africa.

As a person, Gamal Mokhtar was admired and greatly respected by all who worked or came in contact with him. His most characteristic traits were an endearing modesty and a genuine humanistic mind. He had a keen sense of humour and was always fond of a good joke.

We greatly lament Dr Mokhtar's death. He will certainly be missed by his numerous friends all over the world.

Mustafa El-Abbadi, historian





Madeleine Albright is all ears, as President Mubarak firmly explains Egypt's scepticism about the need for military action against Iraq *(photo: Reuters)*

'An ideal outing'

President Mubarak is scheduled to open Cairo's 30th International Book Fair today, reports **Amira Howeidy**

Following last year's low turnout, mainly because the fair was held during the fasting month of Ramadan, officials are determined to make this year's event a success.

Visitors to the fair grounds at Nasr City will not only be greeted by a mosaic of colourful tiles decorating the entrance but will also be able to use an underground tunnel to cross traffic-crammed Salah Salem Street in order to reach the fair without having to worry about streams of speeding cars.

An even greater achievement, sources at the General Egyptian Book Organisation say, is that the fair's two-week events will be featured on the Internet. This year's theme is: "Egypt and the Third Millennium," in acknowledgment of the fact that Egypt is at the threshold of another millennium of civilisation.

Unlike previous years, the theme is non-political and yet political issues will be debated at the book fair's seminars. According to Culture Minister Farouk Hosni, terrorism and the challenges facing the Arab world in an era of globalisation will be given special attention. These include economic challenges, as the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs comes into force, and the proposed establishment of a common Arab market.

As a result of improved political relations with both Iraq and Sudan, the two Arab countries are officially taking part for the first time in several years, said Samir Sarhan, head of the Book Organisation. French thinker Roger Garaudy, who was recently put on trial in Paris on charges of questioning the scope of Nazi crimes against the Jews, has been invited by the Culture Ministry. If Garaudy comes, he will give a lecture on his controversial book, *The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics.*

According to Hosni, 2,450 publishers from 79 countries are displaying a record 3.7 million books. They are divided into 27 sections and will be sold at a discount ranging from 10 to 15 per cent.

Declaring that last year's failure will not be repeated, Salah El-Me'adawi, Book Organisation spokesman, said, "We have carefully planned this year's event. We are confident that a visit to the fair will be an ideal outing for the Egyptian family."

Dropping in to shop

The Tourism Ministry has decided to organise a major shopping festival next summer. But can Egypt really compete with other major Arab shopping destinations such as Dubai and Beirut? **Rehab Saad** previews the forthcoming consumer's extravaganza

Shopping is a tourism fashion worldwide: Singapore, London and Hong Kong are among the world's leading consumer destinations. Recently, some Arab cities, notably Dubai and Beirut, have decided to follow suit, organising successful shopping festivals that have attracted thousands of visitors. The two Arab cities have made significant gains from this success, in terms both of revenue and reputation.

Now it may be Egypt's turn to get a piece of the action. But will it be able to compete? That's the thousand-dollar (or yen or ecu) question, and tourism experts are divided in their response.

In an attempt to revive the tourism industry, which was crippled by last November's Luxor massacre, the Ministry of Tourism has decided to organise a shopping festival in Cairo and Hurghada that will last a month, from 20 July to 20 August. Summer is the favourite season for Arab tourists. A number of ministries, including supply and home trade, interior and finance, will be taking part, as well as EgyptAir, big hotels, travel agencies and shopping malls.

"The aim is to promote Egypt and attract the largest possible number of tourists. We want the Month of Shopping to be an occasion when we can market Egypt in its entirety," said Tourism Minister Mamdouh El-Beltagui.

The festival venues will include the Cairo Trade Fair grounds in Nasr City and the Cairo International Conference Centre, as well as several shopping malls and hotel annexes. There will be discounts on many goods and non-Egyptian buyers will be refunded the sales tax upon their departure, Beltagui said. EgyptAir, in cooperation with travel agencies, will offer attractive packages including reduced air fare, hotel accommodation and tour programmes.

Some tourism experts believe the festival will attract a large number of visitors and thus be highly beneficial to Egypt. Others suspect that it will be a pale copy of what Beirut and Dubai are doing, and question Egypt's ability to compete in this arena. Beirut is organising a similar week-long event this month, for the second year running, and Dubai will hold its shopping festival between 19 March and 20 April, making it three in a row.

"I believe it is an excellent idea that has proved to be successful in other countries. There is no harm in learning from their experiences," said Nagwa Emad, public relations manager of Sonesta Hotels. She stressed that the key to success will be close cooperation between air carriers, hotels and shopping malls.

Ezzeddin El-Shabrawi of Egyptian-American Tours sees no competition between the Egyptian and other Arab shopping festivals, "because the products and points of attraction are different." Affirming the importance of putting quality products on display, he said the capital's streets should also be re-paved to make it possible for tourists to go on shopping strolls.

But Adel Zaki, chairman of ITA tours, objected to the idea. "How can we compete with Dubai, which is a free-trade zone that imposes no customs or taxes on products?" he asked. Zaki also questioned the timing, which he described as "unsuitable". "A shopping festival should be held during a low season, not during the peak season for Arab tourism. How can I ask shops to give discounts in a season like that?" he said.

George Ghobrial, a member of the board of the Chamber of Travel Agencies, said Dubai, as a free-trade zone, can display products from the four corners of the earth — gold, clothes, cars, electrical appliances, furniture, etc. "But here, there is nothing but Egyptian products," he pointed out. Ghobrial warned that extensive preparation and additional studies would be needed "or else we will be running the risk of severe criticism."

Maged Abaza, board chairman of the International Company for Touristic Development, shared the same view. "Our target is the Arab market, and Arabs are accustomed to have products from all over the world to choose from. In order to tempt them to buy Egyptian products, we have to display the best of our best. This would require at least a year of careful study," he said.

Abaza also pointed out that the Dubai festival includes tombolas and the winners are awarded very expensive prizes, such as a kilogramme of gold or a luxury car. "If we cannot compete in gold, we should give something typically Egyptian, such as a pharaonic artifact. We have to start where Dubai leaves off, and not try to copy it," he said.

During the forthcoming Dubai festival, 60 kilogrammes of gold and 38 luxury cars will be distributed as prizes. Mohamed Qerqawi, coordinator of the Dubai festival, told a news conference last week that last year's event drew 1.6 million visitors and an even larger number was expected this year.

Emad of Sonesta Hotels insisted that Egypt can be competitive. "With the private sector's support, we too can offer expensive prizes. For example, car manufacturers and importers can offer good cars," she said.

Shabrawi agreed. "We have a rich private sector. You can see this in the TV commercials which advertise many prizes," he said.

Abaza stressed the importance of extensive media coverage.

Queen Nefret reappears at the Louvre

The controversy over the idea of celebrating 200 years of Franco-Egyptian cultural relations continues to rage but, as **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports, it has taken a fresh twist

When the idea of celebrating Napoleon Bonaparte's arrival in Egypt 200 years ago was first broached last year, it immediately triggered a controversy in intellectual circles. To placate the wrath of opponents, the title of the events was changed to "France in Egypt, and Egypt in France." The celebrations climaxed in December with the reopening of a refurbished and enlarged Egyptian section at the Louvre Museum by French President Jacques Chirac.

The controversy has taken a new turn in the past two weeks, as opponents charged that at least one item on display at the Louvre had been stolen from Egypt, as recently as last December.

One of the opponents, satiric writer Ahmed Ragab, lashed out at Culture Minister Farouk Hosni because the latter, in a television appearance, described those who opposed the celebrations as "ignorant people who cannot appreciate the cultural ties between the two countries."

Ragab published a series of articles in the weekly newspaper *Akhbar El-Yom*, lambasting the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) for looking the other way while Egypt's heritage was being smuggled out of the country. As an example, he cited the statue of Queen Nefret, wife of King Senusert II (Sesostris) and mother of Senusert III of the 12th Dynasty. According to a Louvre official, the statue was acquired by the museum in December to be displayed at the newly reopened Egyptian hall.

"The French culture minister has admitted that the statue was bought in December and added to the collection of Egyptian treasures," Ragab wrote. Hosni, he said, should have asked French authorities to return the statue since the "deal" took place after a 1972 UNESCO treaty took effect, giving countries whose antiquities were stolen the right to retrieve them.

Ragab claimed that the rare statue had been on display in the past at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo but then disappeared for months, only to reappear at the Louvre.

In another television appearance, Hosni dismissed Ragab's claim as unfounded. And SCA Secretary-General Gaballah Ali Gaballah insisted that the statue was never showcased at the Egyptian Museum, simply because it was smuggled out of the country in the 18th century.

But Christiane Zeigler, curator of the Egyptian section of the Louvre, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* by phone that the statue was acquired by the Louvre in December. She did not reveal, however, who sold the statue to the museum. Gaballah replied that the SCA was following up the matter with the cultural counsellor at the Egyptian Embassy in Paris.

Meanwhile, the festivities continue uninterrupted in the French capital. An exhibition of Fayoum portraits will be held at the Louvre next month. Another exhibition featuring the glory of Alexandria will take place in May.



One of the items on display in the newly-refurbished Egyptian antiquities section at the Louvre

Record acquittals by military court

Two Islamist militants were sentenced to death by a military court after they were convicted of planning to assassinate top government officials, but 32, including an AUC student, were acquitted. **Khaled Dawoud** attended

The trial of 65 Gama'a Islamiya militants which opened on 17 November — the same day of the Luxor massacre — drew to a conclusion last Sunday. The military tribunal sentenced two militants to death, one to life imprisonment and 30 to prison terms ranging from one to 15 years. Another 32 defendants were acquitted — a relatively large number considering the charges they were facing and the record of military tribunals in passing harsh sentences.

The death sentences passed against Gamal Abu Rawash and Taha Abdel-Razeq drew criticism from the Islamist defense lawyers. "They were only accused of planning attacks and neither of them was actually involved in any acts of violence," said lawyer Saad Hasaballah. The defendants were accused of keeping a close watch on top government officials with the intention of assassinating them eventually. These included presidential adviser Osama El-Baz, chief of the presidential staff Zakaria Azmi, State Security Judge Salah Badour — who is known for his tough sentences against militants — and Hassan Hanafi, a writer and professor of philosophy.

One of the defendants who drew a 15-year sentence, Ahmed Abdel-Wahab Khalil, had been sentenced to death in absentia by a state security court in 1996 for taking part in the killing of top police officers in southern Egypt. He was arrested shortly before the opening of his second trial in November. According to the law, he must be put on a third trial to confirm or commute the death sentence because it was passed against him in absentia.

A juvenile, Amr Ali Nasr, whose father holds a dual Egyptian-American nationality, was sentenced to three years in jail. The judge announced that he used mercy with the defendant because of his young age. Nasr was 15 at the time of his arrest last year.

The 65 defendants included four lawyers who allegedly used their profession to pass instructions from imprisoned Gama'a leaders to their followers outside. Three lawyers were acquitted and the fourth was sentenced to five years after he was convicted of giving refuge to militants and providing them with forged documents.

According to prosecutors, the militants were led by Abu Rawash, a doctor, and Abdel-Razeq, a student. Abu Rawash has a long history of involvement in militant activities. In 1989, he was acquitted by a state security court for lack of evidence after he was charged with trying to assassinate former Interior Minister Zaki Badr. Following his release, he went underground. As police tried to arrest him again, they shot and killed his brother in a raid on what they believed was his hideout.

Abu Rawash, prosecutors added, used his charisma to recruit new young members for the Gama'a. Those were mostly young students, and some of them hailed from rich families, such as Nasr, the juvenile, and another student at the American University in Cairo (AUC), Amr Ashour. While Nasr persuaded his family to rent a flat to Abu Rawash so that he can use it as a hideout, Ashour was accused of donating money to Abu Rawash. Ashour was acquitted for lack of evidence. His father, who owns a factory, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* at the opening session that Ashour thought the money went to support Bosnian Muslims during the civil war in the former Yugoslavia. Ashour was also accused of "stealing" chemicals from an AUC laboratory, allegedly to make a bomb.

Abu Rawash refused to speak to reporters throughout the trial. After the death sentences were announced, he stood smiling and tried to calm down his brother, a lawyer, who broke down and wept. Abdel-Razeq, on the contrary, reacted angrily. He shouted anti-government slogans and referred to himself as "martyr Abdel-Razeq".

"There is no God but God and we want the law of God," Abdel-Razeq said. "Down with the unjust state," he shouted.

Before leaving the courtroom cage at the end of the hearing, many defendants walked up to Abu Rawash and kissed his hand and forehead — a show of respect that appeared to indicate he was the leader.

Apart from Abu Rawash's brother who was allowed into the courtroom as a lawyer, family members were barred from the Haikstep desert military camp where military trials are usually held. Security officials have always prevented families from attending the sentencing sessions, fearing possible rioting by the relatives. Reporters were also prevented from leaving the courtroom for more than two hours until the defendants were taken out. The journalists were later escorted in a bus for nearly one kilometre and then dropped at the Cairo-Ismailia highway — also to prevent them from getting in touch with the families who were waiting impatiently since the early morning for the sentences.

Another Islamist lawyer, who spoke to the *Weekly* on condition of anonymity, said he hoped that this trial would be the last to be conducted by military judges. At present, there are no militants awaiting trial by the military courts.

The lawyer disclosed that the Interior Ministry has "quietly" released 640 militants on the occasion of *Eid Al-Fitr* — including some who belong to the Gama'a. The released militants were detained for long periods, under the Emergency Law in force since 1981, without being charged or put on trial.

"We hope that steps like this [releasing militants] will help in improving the atmosphere and persuading the expatriate Gama'a leaders to agree to the cease-fire appeal made by the jailed leaders in July," said the lawyer. The so-called "historic" leaders of the Gama'a repeatedly called upon their followers in recent months to stop anti-government attacks unconditionally. But their appeal went unheeded because expatriate leaders insisted that violence would not stop unless the government showed readiness to meet some of their demands. These include the release of thousands of Gama'a members and allowing the group to regain control of mosques the government seized following the outbreak of violence in late 1992. They are also demanding that the government stop putting militants on trial before military courts.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

The Albright sideshow

The US secretary of state held more talks with Arafat and Netanyahu but, as **Graham Usher** reports from Jerusalem, Albright had other, more pressing, matters on her mind

Although couched in the language of protocol, there was little concealing US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's frustration last weekend after another fruitless round of talks on the stalled Oslo peace process. "I would have wished that more could have come out," Albright told a press conference in Jerusalem on 1 February following her meetings with Binyamin Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat.

"We have been stalled at this point in the peace process, negotiating the same issues for a long time. Frankly, far too long."

She also implied that as far as the Americans were concerned, the Oslo process would come under "real threat" unless "difficult decisions" were taken to advance it. Those difficult decisions have yet to be made, especially on the Israeli side.

Despite five hours of "hard talks" with Netanyahu on Saturday night, Albright could extract no more from him than had President Clinton the week before. Netanyahu insisted that the second redeployment would have to be "phased" over several months and conditioned on the Palestinian Authority's (PA) compliance with its security responsibilities under the 1997 Hebron agreement. He also rehearsed the line that should the PA and the Americans insist on a third redeployment (scheduled for August 1998 according to the Hebron agreement), he would reduce the territorial scope of the second. Arafat had reportedly told Clinton that he would rather "resign and let Israel and the US take the consequences" than forgo on the third redeployment.

Given these constraints, the most Albright could offer when she met Arafat on Sunday was a "phased redeployment" in which 10 per cent of the West Bank's C area (under Israel's exclusive control) would be transferred to its B area (under Israel's security but the PA's civilian control), with another 10 per cent of the B area transferred to the A area (under the PA's exclusive control). It was an offer the Palestinian leader refused.

What is less clear is whether the refusal was against the very notion of a phased redeployment or against the miserly amount of land Israel is prepared to cede.

On his return to Gaza last week, Arafat told reporters that "of course" he refused the phased redeployment proposal as a violation of the Hebron agreement. Other PA officials, however, have been more ambiguous. "We will not accept less than a 10 per cent withdrawal", PA presidential advisor Nabil Amru told Israel's daily newspaper *Yediot Aharonot* on 29 January. "And it must be as it was signed in the agreement — from the C area to the A area." The implication here is that the PA is prepared to accept a phased redeployment as long as it involves a "significant and credible" amount of territory.

Whatever the details, most observers viewed the Albright trip as doomed from the outset. In a rare moment of unanimity, both Israel and the PA read the latest American mission as less a genuine attempt to advance the peace process than a PR exercise to muster Arab support for any US action against Iraq.

While supporting America's stance against Iraq "all the way," Netanyahu told *The Jerusalem Post* on 2 February that Israel would not "sacrifice its security just to ingratiate the US with the Arab states of the Gulf."

Similarly, PLO executive member Yasser Abed Rabbo told the Palestinian press on 1 February that Albright would not achieve anything tangible because the US aim was less to "force Israel to implement agreements" than to "gain and recruit support for a military strike against Iraq."

The upshot is a dead peace process on hold.

While Israel and the PA have agreed to send emissaries to Washington this week to work again on a US formula, Oslo is likely to stay put until and unless the Iraqi crisis is resolved.

In the meantime, both sides are acting diplomatically to strengthen their respective positions. On 1 February, a Palestinian delegation, headed by PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat, travelled to Egypt and then to Jordan to coordinate responses to the failed Albright mission. The next day, Netanyahu dispatched cabinet secretary Danny Naveh and foreign policy advisor Uzi Arad to Cairo to meet with Egypt's presidential advisor Osama El-Baz, reportedly as a means to persuade Arafat to "soften his stand."

But the consensus is that such initiatives are sideshows. The main feature, currently, is between America and Iraq.

Jordan swaps alliances

While Iraq faces an imminent US military strike, King Hussein of Jordan lashed out at his former ally, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. **Lola Keilani** reports from Amman on the latest episode in the ups-and-downs of Iraqi-Jordanian ties

The ebb in Jordanian-Iraqi relations reached its nadir this week when King Hussein referred to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as a person who makes "extremely serious miscalculations worsened by stubbornness."

The king further accused Hussein of lying when he recalled that the Iraqi president assured him prior to the occupation of Kuwait that no Arab country should use force against another Arab country.

"All our advice to the Iraqi president was of no avail but we will continue to alleviate the suffering of the victimised Iraqi people," the king said in a letter addressed to Crown Prince Hassan which was publicly aired by the government-run Jordanian media.

Some Jordanian analysts interpreted the king's statements as setting the stage for Jordan's expected support of the US military build-up against Iraq. Reports circulating in Jordan said US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright received the "green light" from the king to proceed with the military strike during their two-hour meeting in London last week. The reports added that King Hussein has even agreed to allow US troops to use Jordan's air and land bases in Azraq and Mafraq, which are adjacent to the Iraqi border. But Crown Prince Hassan denied the reports Sunday and stressed that Jordanian bases will not be used against Iraq.

On the other hand, Jordanian public *opinion is expressing clear signs of solidarity* with Iraq. Opposition parties, led by the Muslim Brotherhood and other leftist groups, have expressed their opposition to any US strike against Iraq, *saying that would only* harm the Iraqi people. Recent solidarity campaigns have been led by Muslim Brotherhood leader Abdul-Majid Thunibat and prominent opposition figure Leith Shubeilat. Shubeilat's close personal relations with Saddam Hussein secured the immediate release of Jordanian prisoners in Iraqi jails two weeks ago, following unsuccessful attempts by Jordanian officials including Crown Prince Hassan.

The release of Jordanian prisoners from Iraqi jails was seen as an embarrassment to the Jordanian government, and a signal from Baghdad that relations on the official level have reached their lowest point since the defection to Amman of Hussein Kamel, Saddam's son-in-law, in February 1996. Kamel was later murdered upon his sudden return to Iraq six months later.

Despite the efforts of top Jordanian officials, the Iraqi regime opted to release the prisoners to Shubeilat, the opposition leader. Saddam Hussein emphasised that he had "released the prisoners for the sake of the Jordanian people who have put their trust in the prominent nationalist Leith Shubeilat."

Shubeilat had been convicted of plotting to overthrow the king in the early 1990s and was sentenced to death. But he was later pardoned by the king. Two years ago, Shubeilat was again pardoned by Hussein after he received a three-year hard labour jail sentence for slandering the king.

Prime Minister Abdul-Salam Majali said that "the king, the crown prince and the government all demanded the release of the prisoners...but regrettably we learned of their release through the media and did not receive a notification in advance. It was a total disregard of official Jordanian efforts and the release was carried out in a manner that was not in harmony with the established norm."

The government's anger became manifest when it subjected Shubeilat along with the accompanying official Iraqi delegation to mistreatment upon their arrival at the Jordanian border. The Iraqi delegation and a television crew were denied entry.

Shubeilat said that some security personnel told him that they "had orders to use violence against me if necessary." Shubeilat was detained for a few hours and the prisoners were denied a welcoming reception organised by the Engineers Syndicate, headed by Shubeilat.

The release was seen as an attempt by the Iraqi authorities to appease the Jordanian public since it came on 19 January — one day after the shocking murders of eight people, including an Iraqi diplomat, in Amman's fashionable Rabia district. The Jordanian public was angered by the brutality of the murders — the victims were chained up and stabbed to death — and by indications that the slayings were the result of internal Iraqi disputes carried out on the orders of Saddam's son Oday.

Iraq seems to be drawing a clear line between its strained relations with the Jordanian government, on the one hand, and with the Jordanian people, on the other. Following the 8 December execution in Baghdad of four Jordanians accused of smuggling spare auto parts, the king strongly criticised the Iraqi leadership and said that he "will not forget nor forgive any party that spills the blood of Jordanians." He added that he did not care if such criticism would anger the Iraqi leadership even if Baghdad reacted by cutting off its supply of oil.

Nevertheless, weeks later, the Iraqi government signed its annual 1998 trade protocol with the kingdom. Baghdad agreed to increase its sales of oil to Jordan to 96,000 barrels of crude oil per day at a rate below international prices. It also agreed to supply Amman with $420 million worth of oil for free.

This step was greatly appreciated by the Jordanian public which perceived it as an assurance by the Iraqi authorities that they would not harm the living conditions of Jordanians who supported Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War.

Like Iraq, the official line in Jordan since 1996 has been to distinguish between the Iraqi regime and the Iraqi people. On several occasions, the king hinted that the Iraqi regime was behind the suffering of its people. The government allows around 100,000 Iraqis to live in the kingdom with and without residence permits. The authorities also allowed the Iraqi opposition movement Al-Wifaq to open an office in the Kingdom and to contact Iraqis coming from Baghdad.

Jordanian opposition groups, meanwhile, proved their value as a political card in Saddam's hand when they also slammed the government for its attack against the Iraqi regime. Salem Falahat, a member of the executive bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood, said that the strain in relations was due to external pressures "since the Jordanian officials were incapable of making independent decisions."





Lebanese army tanks roar through the streets of Baalbeck, on their way to the nearby village of Brital, where ousted Hizbullah leader Sobhi Tufayli is believed to be taking refuge with his followers *(photos: AFP & Reuters)*

'Hunger revolution' leader takes to the hills

Shi'ite Lebanese leader Sheikh Subhi Tufayli has been a thorn in the side of the government since last summer, yet the army crackdown on *his movement last week angered many. **Zeina Khodr** reports from Beirut*

Once a powerful leader and a radical cleric, Sheikh Subhi Tufayli is now a fugitive. The *Lebanese army's manhunt* for Tufayli continues after state prosecutors issued an arrest warrant against the sheikh on charges of "inciting violence, endangering civil peace and forming armed groups".

"He crossed the line," Lebanon's Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri told reporters while in Paris on a private visit. "The authorities have been patient ever since Tufayli launched his civil disobedience campaign against the government. *But Tufayli went too far:* he challenged the state and the law and disrupted internal peace."

Well-informed sources in Beirut, however, said the decision to apprehend Tufayli and *crush his movement was made by high-ranking* Syrian and Iranian officials. The sources indicated that the decision was reached during a visit several days earlier by Iranian envoy Mohammed Ali Abtahi to Damascus and Beirut. Syria is the main power-broker *in Lebanon and* Iran wields influence here through Hizbullah. The move came only days before Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri's scheduled visit to Lebanon and Syria. "Tufayli and his actions *had become a burden to Teh*ran, especially since Tufayli was challenging the Hizbullah movement and threatening to undermine the struggle against Israeli occupation in south Lebanon," said one informed Leb*anese source.*

On Friday, in what was seen as a provocative act, Tufayli and his armed followers occupied a Hizbullah-run school — which was empty at the time — in the city of Baalbeck in the Bekaa Valley. Hizbullah fighters refrained from firing on Tufayli's men and accused the cleric of trying to stir up unrest. "He is attempting to sow dissent within the Lebanese Shi'ite community." Hizbullah said in a statement. The Lebanese army stepped in to defuse a potentially explosive situation, but Tufayli refused to obey their ultimatum to leave the building and fierce clashes took place. Three army soldiers and five civilians, including former Parliament Deputy Khodr Tleis who was one of Tufayli's closest advisers, were killed.

Tufayli's action signalled an escalation in the tension with Hizbullah which had been sparked off a week earlier when the party expelled him, accusing him of seeking to split their ranks and criticising the leadership. The charges allude to a separate rally Tufayli had organised to mark Jerusalem Day celebrations in Baalbeck, which fall *on the last Friday of Ramadan* each year. The Jerusalem celebrations were initiated by late Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomenei to symbolise support for the Palestinian struggle. Tufayli refused to recognise the group's decision to expel *him and pledged to push forward with his campaign.*

"That was the breaking point... Tufayli's campaign against the government, which had begun with the declared aim of improving socio*economic conditions in the Bekaa,* turned political. He was pointing his guns at Hizbullah," one Hizbullah source told the *Weekly*. "Iran did not want to stand idle while Tufayli went ahead and undermined the Hizbullah," he added.

Tufayli was Hizbullah's first secretary-general in the 1980s. He broke ranks with the movement in 1992, when its leadership decided to take part in parliamentary elections in Lebanon. He was then stripped of all official positions, but continued to enjoy support within the group. The radical sheikh accuses Hizbullah of being too soft, even though the movement has a hardline stance on the US and spearheads attacks on Israeli occupying forces in south Lebanon. Tufayli then re-emerged onto the political scene last summer when he launched his "Hunger Revolution" against the government and urged residents in the Bekaa to follow a policy of civil disobedience. He organised protests and blocked roads in a bid to pressure the government into tackling the dire socio-economic conditions in the Bekaa Valley. In doing so, he drew an enthusiastic response *from the people who had long felt* neglected by the government.

But it did not take long for this campaign on behalf of the poor to degenerate into a power struggle with the Hizbullah leadership.

Tufayli's whereabouts remain a mystery since he left the scene of Friday's gun battle in Baalbeck. Reports said he and a band of his followers had been able to escape the army siege on the school after knocking down the walls separating *the school* from adjacent buildings.

Others say the army allowed Tufayli to escape since the authorities did not want to capture him, but had intended only to crush his rebellion.

Heavily armed troops, meanwhile, continue to surround Tufayli's native village of Brital, seven kilometres southwest of Baalbeck, where some believe he has taken refuge. Others say he may have slipped away from Brital to seek shelter in the hills close to the Syrian border.

As the search operation continues, the army has clamped down on the movement's infrastructure. Troops dismantled *Tufayli's unlicensed radio station* in the Bekaa and confiscated a large quantity of weapons, explosives and ammunition from his headquarters in Baalbeck. All Tufayli's facilities in the Bekaa and the southern suburbs of Beirut *have also been closed.*

The bloodshed and the army operation have ignited tension in the Bekaa area. There were mixed reactions on the streets. But in Brital, villagers vowed revenge. "Death to Hizbullah, Death to [Hizbullah's secretary-general Hassan] Nasrallah and Death to Hariri," crowds chanted during the funeral of Tleis in Brital.

It remains to be seen whether the violence will spread. But it seems Hizbullah is determined to keep calm, and they deliberately avoided confronting Tufayli's followers directly when they occupied the school. "We feel sorry for what happened. We are working to find a peaceful solution and we are trying to calm things down," a Hizbullah official said.

Russian peace mission snagged

Russia insisted it had made progress in efforts to persuade Iraq to comply with UN demands despite denials by both Iraqi and US officials. **Abdel-Malek Khalil** writes from Moscow that Washington is unwilling to see Russia once again halt its plans to strike Iraq

A spokesman for Russian President Boris Yeltsin told reporters Tuesday that the mission of special representative deputy Russian Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvalyuk, now in Baghdad, "is continuing and is bringing positive results." But both Washington and Baghdad heaped scorn on Russian reports that said Iraq had effectively offered a compromise in the crisis over UN arms inspections.

US Defence Secretary *William* Cohen dismissed a reported Iraqi proposal under which arms inspectors might be allowed into eight previously closed presidential sites, saying it was not "an appropriate solution at this time." Iraq also dismissed the *Kremlin's* assertion that Baghdad had agreed conditionally to allow the UN inspectors access to the restricted sites as "totally incorrect", although it said talks to end the crisis were continuing.

Interfax news agency in Moscow said Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had proposed that UN inspectors entering the eight sites would have to be called representatives of their countries' governments. They would have to be accompanied, according to the Interfax report, by diplomats from permanent Security Council members — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

Moscow has launched a diplomatic initiative to prevent hostilities using its traditional influence with Iraq to try to find a political solution to the crisis.

In Washington, a White House official said US President Bill Clinton and Yeltsin discussed the crisis for 20 minutes over the telephone on Monday and agreed to pursue a peaceful solution if possible. They also agreed that Iraq's defiance of the United Nations and the restrictions it had placed on the world body's arms inspectors were unacceptable.

But informed sources in Russia told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the US might not be willing to allow Moscow to halt its plans to bomb Iraq. When a similar crisis broke out between the US and Baghdad in November, it was the intervention of Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, who has been described in the American media as a personal friend of Saddam Hussein, which helped defuse the crisis. Primakov managed to strike a deal which allowed the return of UN inspectors to Iraq in return for assurances to Baghdad that Moscow will push for a step-by-step lifting of the tight seven-year-old sanctions. Moscow also pressed for a more balanced structure in terms of the nationalities of the UN inspection teams, allowing more Russians and Chinese to take part, and offered the participation of Russian planes in monitoring Iraq instead of the American U-2 spy planes. Baghdad accused the Americans working for the UN teams of acting as spies for Washington.

The US-Russian differences over Iraq were clear during the recent meeting between US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Primakov in Spain. Albright said she was "sceptical that diplomacy will solve this problem." She added: "Our patience is running out." Primakov replied: "We are a little bit more patient, you know."

Russian Foreign Ministry sources said Primakov preferred not to get personally involved in attempts to solve the US-Iraqi stand-off right now, preferring instead to send his assistant Posuvalyuk first to Baghdad. Posuvalyuk is also a skillful Russian diplomat who served before as an ambassador to Baghdad and speaks Arabic fluently. However, his influence remains short of that of Primakov — who is described as the "engineer of Russia's foreign policy."

Primakov's takeover of the Foreign Ministry two years ago, replacing Andrei Kozyrev, marked a shift in Russia's policy towards the Arab world. According to Arab diplomats in Russia, Kozyrev was known for his anti-Arab stands and strong support of Israel. Thus, Primakov's appointment gave some hope to the Iraqi government that Russia would show more understanding of its demand for lifting the sanctions.

Moscow is also eager to be Iraq's major trading partner, as it has in the past, as soon as sanctions are lifted. Iraq owes Russia $7 billion in debts and the two countries are hoping to launch joint projects which would cost as much as $11 billion.

A Russian diplomat was quoted as saying that the "United States is clearly using double standards when it comes to dealing with Iraq. While Washington is willing to bomb Iraq for possessing weapons of mass destruction, they are totally silent over Israel's arsenal of nuclear warheads which are as many as 200, besides all other long-range missiles."

Posuvalyuk told reporters in Baghdad that "Russia opposes Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction; therefore, we do not defend all of Iraq's positions, and we want to inspect the [presidential] palaces in Iraq. But we refuse bombing Iraq and we are seeking a diplomatic solution." He further appealed to Washington not to use force and to consider the wide opposition in Arab and Islamic countries to such a move. American use of force could only lead to more regional tension, he added.

This official Russian stand was not echoed by some pro-Israel newspapers in Moscow. Several popular Russian dailies ran articles criticising Saddam for spending his country's money on building palaces and the world's largest mosque, while the Iraqi people are left starving. They also reiterated unconfirmed reports on Iraq's plan to attack Israel with missiles carrying chemical warheads. Meanwhile, Russian television quoted the American daily newspaper *Newsday* as saying that Pentagon officials were considering using "a tactical nuclear bomb against Iraq." Other papers said that the escalation of tensions with Iraq was a coverup for President Clinton's sex scandals at home.

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**



The Arabs inside Israel

Azmi Bishara, member of the Israeli Knesset, reviews the manner in which the contradictions inherent in the position of Israeli-Arabs as supposed citizens of a democratic state are rationalised



Years of dispossession

There has always been some confusion in assessing the position and role of Israeli Arabs vis-à-vis the rest of the Arabs. Before 1967 they were either ignored or viewed with much suspicion; then, in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat, they became the focus of admiration as people who stayed rooted in their homeland against all adversity. And now Israeli Arabs have become increasingly visible to neighbouring Arab countries as a result of the available margin of democracy on Israeli television, on which they can be seen snubbing heads of government and ministers in the Knesset. The question, however, remains: How much of this is an indication of their Arab-Palestinian patriotism, and how much of it is an indication of the strength of the Israeli hold over a people severed from their Arab context? In other words: could all this be a case of Arabs attempting to imitate the Israeli's self-assurance in his state, an Arab playing at being an Israeli?

On the same television screens one sees Arab-Israelis congratulating Israeli ministers and heads-of-state on "independence" day. Indeed, Arabs can be seen actively participating in the culminating event of "independence" day. For three successive years a place has been reserved for an Arab to participate in the lighting of the 12 candles representing the various sectors of Israeli life.

Gone forever is the Arab of the "so-called state of Israel." But gone too, it appears, is the Israeli-Arab as the "last defiant remnant" holding out on his land. Once an inverse image that offered some solace for the despair of defeat and the Palestinian dispersion, defiant endurance became a narcissistic mechanism to compensate for the absence of a political strategy among a defeated minority inside a state that was founded on the ruins of the Arab-Palestinian people.

More recently, defiant endurance has been absorbed into the process of Israelification after having been stripped of its Arab-nationalist dimension. One must remember, though, that the process of Israelification is, of necessity, curtailed from the outset, since it is not based, and cannot be based, on equality. This is not because the Arabs in Israel are part of a greater Arab nation "at a state of war" with Israel, nor because the "modernity gap" between Israelis and Arabs impedes the realisation of equality, as the claims of the two prevalent sociological theories in Israel have it. (Even if we grant these claims for the sake of argument, they only serve, in the best of circumstances, to explain what currently exists in Israel. They do not explain why the realisation of equality will remain impossible in the future, even in the event of peaceful relations between Israel and the Arab World, as long as the current structure of the state of Israel remains unchanged.)

The circumstances of the Palestinian minority in Israel are not fixed and immutable. In spite of the continuing gap between the Arabs and the Jews in income levels, standards of living and other such criteria, Arabs in Israel, since 1967, have been part of the on-going process of development and the concomitant increases in investment rates, consumption and rising levels of education etc. One is tempted to ask the unanswerable question as to which factor is more operative: the rising standards of living or the continuing gap between the Jews and Arabs? That this question cannot be answered, however, does not imply that there is no framework in which the two variables — development and on-going discrimination — operate simultaneously. In this framework — the Israeli framework — Arabs in Israel have become Israelified even in their manner of dealing with the gap that separates them from the Jews. In their dominant political discourse they attempt, as much as possible, to circumvent the crucial question of the instrumental relationship between Jews and their level of prosperity, and the state.





Top: A *New York Times* photo dated August 1948, dispatched with the following caption: "A small portion of the Arab population of Jaffa and Haifa, the two most important Arab centres of the new state of Israel continues, assisted by their Jewish neighbours, to live in peace. In Jaffa approximately 5,000 Arabs, all that remains of the 90,000 which constituted the Arab population of the city, live and work under the direction of a Jewish military governor who provides them with food and lodging. [In the picture] a policeman chats with a street vendor. In Jaffa food is plentiful." Below: Israeli police in Ikrit in 1973 handling a small group of protesters against a military order closing the area.
Source: Al-Ahram Photo Archive

In this respect one notes a significant change in one of the primary indicators which Arabs have used to demonstrate Israeli discrimination against them: the per capita budgetary allocation to local authorities. Whereas in the seventies the Arab per capita share of these allocations stood at less than a tenth of the Jewish per capita share, the figure now stands at approximately a third. The prevailing misconception is that this change happened as a result of the Israeli Labour Party being in power. In fact the change began with the inception of the two party system in Israel at the end of the seventies, at which point the Arab electorate began to acquire greater significance on the political map.

This development, or dynamic, though, has not yet extended to three crucial factors: firstly, the continuing discrimination in the distribution of the common good and social wealth; secondly, and contiguous with the first, that the state of Israel, in essence and in the delineation of its priorities, rests upon the notion of a Jewish majority; and, thirdly, that the Arabs in Israel do not enjoy collective rights — rights as a national minority — other than those rights accorded to religious denominations. Moreover, these latter rights are not fully accorded to Muslims, who are deprived of the right to manage the affairs of their *waqf* (religious endowments) foundations and of the right to appoint religious judges.

How might one rationalise this situation in a state, at the end of the 20th century, that defines itself as a democracy? Clearly, the customary explanations of the theorists of the Israeli establishment are no longer adequate, particularly those pertaining to the "modernity gap" between the Jewish settlers and the "native" society.

To the Palestinians, as a people, Israeli modernism severed the historic continuum of the Palestinian process of modernisation. This process had begun well before 1948. With the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948, Palestinian society lost its political, cultural and economic elite. More importantly, Palestinian society lost the Palestinian city, having been reduced to a village society, separate from but dependent for its subsistence upon a Jewish city that refuses to allow integration. Moreover, with the loss of agriculture as a basis for subsistence, village society became neither rural nor urban. The only avenue to modernisation that remained open to the Palestinians, therefore, was that laid out by the Jewish state and the only alternatives available to Palestinians were marginalisation, imitation or, in the best of circumstances, pressing for some rights. Thus any refutation of the theory attributing the wide gap between the Arab-Israelis and Jewish-Israelis to relative levels of modernity must not overlook the very real distortion the imposed, coercive mode of modernisation has had upon the remnants of Palestinian society inside Israel.

As for the second claim, that the current circumstances of the Arab minority are the result of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the concomitant distrust of Arab citizens' loyalty to the state — this claim is cited in positive as well as negative contexts. It is cited positively by those who believe in the supremacy of the nationalist struggle, hence the disloyalty of the Arab minority inside Israel to the state. It is cited negatively by those who believe that "peace" will prevail in the end and that the Palestinian minority has, in general, proven its loyalty to the state. The latter position is largely represented by social scientists in Israel who remain in favour of the peace process.

One is at pains here to determine how "loyalty to the state" can be accommodated in liberal discourse (What exactly is loyalty to the state in a liberal democratic society. Why should it constitute a condition for granting rights of equal citizenship? What means and standards are to be engaged in determining loyalty in the first place?). One is also struck by the incongruous demand upon the Arab individual to be loyal to a state that was built on the vestiges of his national entity. Regardless of these considerations, however, what is of essence here is that Zionist political parlance has adopted the discourse of loyalty as if the state had an intimate personal relationship with the Arab citizen, encompassing broad sectors of the representatives of the Arab minority, and assuming interaction by this elite with "Jewish democrats" who are pressing for the rights of the Arab national minority on the basis of loyalty to the state. Not only does this discourse sever the Arabs from their Arab cultural identity, it alienates Israeli Jews from their own liberalism.

Recently, a new conceptual model has been forwarded in an attempt to explain the paradox of the situation of the Palestinian minority within the context of an Israeli democracy. This model is potentially far more dangerous, because on the one hand it is more consistent with reality, while on the other, rather than criticising this reality with the aim of changing it, it serves to rationalise such reality in order to enshrine it.

This model rests on three propositions regarding the nature of Israeli democracy. Firstly, it holds that Israel is not a multi-national state possessing a system of neutral consociational democracy under which diverse national groups retain their distinctive collective will, possess the right of veto and enjoy a range of autonomous powers. In juristic terms, Israel, by definition, is neither multi-national, multi-lingual nor multi-cultural as is the case with Belgium, Switzerland and Canada. The national minority in Israel is not a national group on terms of parity with another national group. Indeed, it is not recognised as a national group at all, but rather as a segment of the population that is defined as "non-Jews", the term used in Israel's annual census. Secondly, Israel is not a liberal, assimilationist democracy in which the individual is regarded as a citizen, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliations. Nor is Israeli democracy founded upon the civil definition of the nation as is the case in France and the US. Israel is not a state for all its citizens, it is the state for Jews. Arabs who live in Israel do not make up, together with the Jews, a single, democratic Israeli nation. Rather, "the people of Israel" are, even in Hebrew, the Jewish nation.

It is, furthermore, difficult to describe the system in Israel as apartheid or as a form of *herrenvolk* democracy, in which democratic rights are restricted to a specific segment of the populace. For, the argument goes, Arabs in Israel are not excluded from democracy in Israel, albeit a democracy for the Jews. Officially, they are considered equal in their individual rights. And although this democracy cannot pass the test at the national level, although it treats a segment of its populace as enemies when they put the nation to the test — as occurred on Land Day in 1976 for example — Israel is not apartheid (unless we take the West Bank and Gaza into consideration, which in my opinion constitute a form of Bantustan).

What remains then? Instead of aiming at democratising the existing reality, reality itself has been transformed in accordance with a readymade model of "democracy", one already labelled: an "ethnic democracy" (see Sammy Smooha's work on the the status of the Arab minority in Israel).

When control of the state rests in the hands of a national, ethnic or cultural majority, there can be no question of any talk about a civil nation. On the other hand, within such an "ethnic democracy", the state grants individuals belonging to minorities certain rights as citizens, and theoretically they can aspire to some collective rights as a national minority, although this is the most they can aspire to. Experience suggests that coexistence is possible under such circumstances. However, and as mentioned above, this theoretical model remains an attempt at rationalising the existing reality, rather than an attempt at making use of the theory of democracy as a tool for reaching a critical understanding of a given reality.

The primary flaw in this theory is that it posits the autonomous administration of the national minority, on one hand, and liberal democracy on the other, as two separate and distinct things. It also assumes that there could be no meeting ground whatsoever between liberal democracy, which does not take full account of the particularity of both Arab and Jewish cultural groups, and consociational democracy which provides a framework for the coexistence of distinct national groups but not for the rights of individuals as citizens. Yet it is not true that the two models — liberal and consociational democracy — are mutually exclusive, particularly if we take into consideration the fact that the application of liberal democracy in the contemporary multi-national state must also include the recognition of the existence of distinct and diverse national, ethnic and cultural groups. In all events, Arab and Jewish democrats have no other model to accommodate them, and rather than attempting to construe the current realities as democratic, but of a special variety, it would be more constructive to use theory in order to expose the flaws or absence of democracy as it is applied in Israel.

Another attempt at rationalising the situation of the Arab minority in Israel, predating that of Sammy Smooha's concept of "ethnic democracy", was forwarded by Claude Klein, former dean of the School of Law at the Hebrew University, who proposed self-rule for the Palestinian minority in Israel as a way of preventing the struggle for equal rights rather than as a step on the road to equality. The reason for trying to avert the struggle for equal rights is understandable, for any such struggle cannot but question the very essence of the foundation of the Jewish state. It is important to remember that, contrary to what many believe, self-rule for the Arabs inside Israel was not an idea initially forwarded by Arab intellectuals. Rather, it is an idea developed and favoured by the Israeli academic establishment in an attempt to abort any other development of a conceptual framework capable of reconciling the notion of self-rule with that of equal rights, something that would require by necessity a redefinition of the essence of the state as it exists now.

Successive Israeli governments have established their discrimination against and control over the Arab minority by engaging the state apparatus in the service of the interests of the Jewish majority, as their definition of such interests. And as has been elucidated by many researches into the status of the Arab minority in Israel, this policy has been responsible for the confiscation of Arab land and the economic and infrastructural gap between Arabs and Jews. The model of "ethnic democracy" claims that it is possible to generate a form of equilibrium between the partiality of the state in terms of national groups and impartiality in terms of individual rights and the collective rights of the national minorities. Opponents to this view have asserted that this model bears the seeds of its own downfall in the long run. History, particularly the experiences in Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka and Cyprus before 1974, has demonstrated that such structurally institutionalised discrimination against national minorities inevitably leads to conflagration.

On closer inspection, one could suggest that there is a distinction between discrimination against immigrant or migrant minorities and discrimination against indigenous national groups who consider themselves the original proprietors of the land. Both experience and common sense tell us that it is virtually impossible to placate indigenous national groups with a deficient democracy. Under such conditions, national, religious and cultural tensions continue to smoulder until the conflict erupts, yielding one of two results: either separation or a reformulation of a historic compromise in the form of a consociational democracy.

This distinction, however, is insufficient unless it is accompanied by some modification in patterns of thought and behaviour. The status of the indigenous minority is not a question of place of birth, but primarily one of culture. If, as a result of numerous factors, the Israeli culture of marginalisation prevails among Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel this will mean, at least in the foreseeable future, that they will accept the status of a minority in an "ethnic democracy", in other words, less than full equality as individuals and as a collective national entity. The dominant political discourse, which is simultaneously the product of and formulator of culture, appears to accept this model of a deficient democracy. It is this acceptance that provides the model with its primary impetus, rather than its logical coherence and argumentative force. What presents itself as a form of pragmatism — and how frequently the Arabs confuse pragmatism with shrewdness — is an integral part of the dominant culture of the Israeli Arab. Inside Israel the appeal for more rights is counterbalanced by acceptance of the Jewish character of the state and its claims to loyalty, while for Arabs it is justified as a coming to grips with reality.

What is culture if not a mode of interacting with reality? It is the way Israeli Arabs are presently dealing with their complex reality that I call Israelification, a process of a cultural and psychological adaptation to the status of half-Israeli citizen, on the one hand, and half-national group, on the other.

Yet we must always remind ourselves that "reality", like our ways of dealing with it, is not a given, is something constantly in a process of formation and change; and that the acceptance of injustice is part and parcel of the creation of an unjust reality. Thus the only possible way for the Arab minority inside Israel to confront the challenge of Israelification is not to deny the existence of such a process, but to engage in a struggle for equality, a struggle which can simultaneously challenge the Zionist-Jewish essence of the Israeli state while at the same time mobilising the Arab minority in the battle to gain their national rights as Arabs who belong to a wider collective national identity than that of Arabs inside Israel.



AN ACTIVIST of India's Congress Party holds an election poster of Sonia Ghandi in Calcutta. The Italian-born widow of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Ghandi is campaigning for the Congress Party ahead of the 16 February elections. Although Ghandi has not announced her candidacy for political office, she has been attracting huge crowds and has given a boost to the beleaguered party which has ruled India for all but five of its 50 years of independence. The Congress Party's main rival is the right-wing ultra-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, which, according to opinion polls, is likely to win most seats in the upcoming elections. *(photo: Reuters)*

A straw in the storm

As Monica Lewinsky prepares to get her testimony in a twist, Clinton sees his popularity rise and rise. Jooneed Khan watches the US president almost getting away with it

"Crisis throws Republicans into disarray", headlined the Web news network MSNBC last Sunday. "The scandal is even providing a boost to the Democratic Party," wrote *The New York Times* on Monday.

The reference, of course, is to the spate of contradictory reports, rumour and innuendo about US President Bill Clinton having sex with Monica Lewinsky in 1995, then a 21-year-old unpaid intern at the White House, and subsequently advising her to lie about it under oath during the inquiry into the sexual harassment charges laid against him by Paula Jones. Ms Jones, at the time an employee of the State of Arkansas in her early 20s, accuses then Governor Bill Clinton of having invited her to his Little Rock hotel room in 1991 and asked her for a sexual favour.

The headlines also allude to the wave of opinion polls taken by media groups over the past week showing Clinton's approval rating at an all-time high. A *Washington Post* survey published on Sunday put it at 67 per cent, *Newsweek* magazine had it at 70 per cent, a *Time* magazine/CNN poll set it at 68 per cent, and it reached a record 72 per cent in America's heartland, according to a *Chicago Tribune* survey.

"What is going on here?" has become the question of the week in the US media, in the press and on TV shows and talk radio. Has "Billy boy" done it again? Are we dealing with President Teflon-II (after Ronald Reagan)? Has the "Comeback Kid" pulled another victory from the jaws of defeat? Is the American public showing more sophistication than its media elite, separating Clinton's private life from the performance of his public duties? Or did Hillary Clinton score big with her spirited defense of her beleaguered husband, the target, she said, of "an ongoing right-wing conspiracy"?

There is perhaps a bit of each; the answer may also be none of the above. The composite judgment one could glean from commentators — barring the partisan "spin-doctors" of both political stripes — goes somewhat like this: With the budget deficit down from $357 billion to $10 billion and heading for its first surplus in 30 years, with unemployment and inflation at record lows, and with no servicemen engaged in war abroad, the US is feeling better about itself than it has in more than two decades. Six in 10 Americans surveyed also believe their country is headed in the right direction. Clinton's State of the Union speech, they say, plugged right into this upbeat national mood. That was when he broke a week-long silence with the controversy swirling all around him, and star TV anchormen had to be flown back precipitously from the Pope's visit to Cuba to set up a state of siege around the White House.

Some point out that Clinton's decision to say nothing before that 27 January speech was in fact a strategy driven by private Democratic and White House polls showing wide public satisfaction with his policies and job performance. And, they add, the State of the Union address was itself crafted to further reinforce that feeling. There was something thrown in for everybody, with the emphasis on saving social security for the ageing baby-boomers, and with the very hawkish reference to Iraq — a low-risk affair for US fighting men, since any attack would essentially be conducted by electronic warfare.

These same commentators point out, however, that Bill Clinton's favourable rating remains very fragile. Indeed, the polls, conducted after the State of the Union speech, also indicate that most Americans believe their President has lied or is hiding something.

A CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup Poll on Monday showed that 62 per cent believe Clinton is not telling the truth about his affair with ex-intern Monica Lewinsky. 55 per cent believe he had an affair with her, 62 per cent believe he had affairs with other women, 52 per cent believe he lied under oath, and 53 per cent believe he is not honest and trustworthy. One Hart/Teeter poll conducted for NBC News found that only five per cent think their president is totally truthful and honest. And the poll has a plus or minus five per cent margin of error. A *Washington Post* survey shows that more than half the people polled agree that "Clinton has only himself to blame" for the controversy — and six out of ten suspect that the Clinton presidency will be remembered for allegations about his personal life and not for its accomplishments. More ominously, an NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll showed that 52 per cent think that Clinton should be impeached and removed from office, should reports that he encouraged Lewinsky to commit perjury turn out to be true.

If the reports of suborning witnesses and perjury turn out to be true, the approval ratings may turn out to be merely the last straw Clinton clutched at as the storm descended. Monica Lewinsky's flip-flop has thrown special prosecutor Kenneth Starr's investigation into disarray — and is now causing resentment among Republicans who chose to watch the scandal unfold from the sidelines.

Indeed, it does seem the whole scandal was precipitated at the very crucial moment when Starr was trying to get Clinton or his friend Vernon Jordan to confirm on the phone to Lewinsky that they had tried to get her to lie at the Paula Jones inquest.

What caused events to accelerate prematurely, and perhaps get Clinton off the hook, was a tidbit of Lewinsky gossip scooping: *Newsweek*'s ongoing reporting by Michael Isikoff was flashed across the Internet by the *Drudge Report*, a Washington web site run by former pizza delivery-man Matt Drudge. As it turns out, Matt Drudge is connected to Lucianne Goldberg, "literary agent" to Linda Tripp, a former White House adversary of the Clintons and the "friend" of Monica Lewinsky who taped their phone conversations, it is said variously "to protect herself", to gather material for a book, and to help Starr in his investigation.

That the bomb exploded in the very midst of the Pope's historic visit to Cuba, and of Binyamin Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat's visit to Washington, may not have been pure coincidence: Republican hawk Jesse Helms, of the controversial Helms-Burton Amendment, was already wresting the initiative from Clinton by proposing to ease the Cuban embargo for humanitarian purposes — probably in exchange for the firm implementation of the bill's extraterritorial clause targeting foreign firms doing business in Cuba.

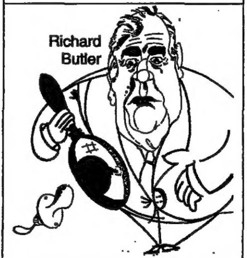
Fed up with what they perceive as the paralysing consensus of UN multilateralism, Republican hawks were also at work prodding Clinton for a Lone Ranger toughness on Iraq more in tune with their idea of true Superpower world leadership. And once Clinton, effectively reduced to a political neutrality as complete as that of the Queen of England, was impotent to exert pressure on Israel or deliver land for peace to Arafat, Netanyahu proffered his support to the US President — and lined up behind the Republican Congress against both Iraq and Iran. William Ginsburg, the lawyer for Monica Lewinsky, then told the Israeli daily *Yediot Ahronot* that "Clinton is a good President because he is supportive of Israel and the Jews".

But Starr is plodding on. The investigation continues and Clinton's trial in the Paula Jones case is set for May. Monica Lewinsky, pampered daughter of a wealthy Beverly Hills Jewish doctor, may yet have to choose between going to jail for Clinton — like Susan McDougall in the Whitewater case — and telling the truth.

Clinton's African-American supporters are rallying around him, with Jesse Jackson in the lead. But women are starting to speak out against the president's womanising. Liberal critics are now lashing out at Clinton as "the most Republican of all Democratic presidents". And with one eye on the 1998 Congressional elections and the other on the 2000 Presidential campaign, the Republicans themselves are shedding their uncharacteristic restraint. Washington, a town famous for the practice of politics as a blood sport, would seem to be returning to its traditions.







New Baltic bloc

Can Germany and Russia paper over their traditional rivalry for supremacy in the Baltic region? asks Abdel-Malek Khalil from Moscow

Heads of state and government from the 11-member Council of Baltic States met in the Latvian capital Riga last weekend to forge a new European political and economic grouping centred around the Baltic Sea. "I think we took the first important steps toward a Baltic Sea identity," said Danish Prime Minister Poul Nyrop Rasmussen.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States includes Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The countries bordering the Baltic have traditionally been a stage for power struggles between Germany and Russia. But today, the two most powerful nations of the region aim to bridge the gap between Western and Eastern Europe and to create a middle way between NATO member countries and those countries that have not yet joined NATO.

The Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are keen to join NATO, and are being courted by the United States which invited them to sign the US-Baltic charter last week in which Washington pressed for the three Baltic states' membership in NATO.

Russia, however, has warned against NATO's eastward expansion, and Moscow offered security guarantees instead to the three states if they relinquished their long-time goal of joining NATO. Political tensions still exist between Russia and the former Soviet Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — which were the first to break away from the now-defunct Soviet Union.

Another bone of contention between nations bordering the Baltic Sea is the widening gap in economic performance between Eastern and Western Europe. While the economies of the East are in disarray, the countries of the West are enjoying very high standards of living. With rising expectations in the East in the wake of the collapse of Communism, there is great pressure on affluent countries like Germany and the Scandinavian states to spearhead development efforts in Eastern Europe.

Social ills in Eastern Europe threaten to spill into the West. An estimated 30 per cent of prostitutes in Western Europe come from the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Western European and Nordic countries are eager to stop the influx of East European economic immigrants. Latvian Prime Minister Guntars Krasts urged the richer Baltic countries to increase development aid to the poor countries of the region.

Poverty and economic problems also fuel ethnic and sectarian conflicts. The alleged persecution of the ethnic Russian minorities in the three former Soviet Baltic states are a constant cause of concern to Moscow. "As we stand on the threshold of the 21st century, ethnic Russians are denied any political and civic rights in the three Baltic republics," warned Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, who represented his country at the Riga conference. He urged the three former Soviet republics to improve their human rights record.

The different countries of the Baltic region had different agendas, but the Riga conference offered as good a forum as any to iron out the differences. "Security in the Baltic region and in the north is based not on the philosophy of the balance of military potential but on strong measures of trust and practical cooperation," Chernomyrdin told the region's leaders.

Norwegian leader Kjell Magne Bondevik called on the Baltic states to establish a regional "common market". Norway is not a member of the European Union. The wealthiest country per capita in the region, Norway is awash with petro-dollars and is reluctant to join the EU. But Norway also encourages the creation of a looser economic grouping in Europe to counter the hegemony of the EU.

German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, not to be upstaged, reminded the Baltic leaders of the region's grim past. "The betrayal of the Baltic states to Stalin was one of the worst acts of Hitler, and I haven't forgotten that," Kohl said. The Baltic states all aim for NATO membership, and Germany, in spite of Russian objections, supports their attempts to join both the EU and NATO.

Mowlam in Irish maze

A new inquiry into the "Bloody Sunday" massacre has been promised, only two weeks after Mo Mowlam, secretary of state for Northern Ireland, entered the Maze prison to talk directly to the Irish paramilitaries. Yet the continuing spate of sectarian violence still threatens to derail Irish peace plans. Mansoor Mirza reports from London

Thousands of Northern Irish Catholics marched through the centre of Londonderry on Sunday to commemorate the 26th anniversary of "Bloody Sunday" when 14 people were killed by British soldiers during a peaceful demonstration. Sunday's march was particularly significant to Irish nationalists since British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that the government would open a new inquiry into the massacre. The original 1972 inquiry had absolved the police and army of all responsibility, despite eye-witness claims that the security forces had opened fire on unarmed demonstrators. Police were conspicuously absent from this Sunday's march as the demonstrators demanded "truth" about the massacre and "justice" for the victims and their families.

In line with his stated policy of advocating a peaceful solution to the Irish question, Tony Blair's government has adopted a conciliatory posture towards Irish nationalists — hence the proposed inquiry and the non-interference in Sunday's march. Yet will conciliation be enough?

At the end of last year, the British government were ready to give themselves a 'pat on the back' over the way negotiations were going in the all-party talks at Stormont. The year had seen a renewal of the IRA cease-fire that at last seemed to be sticking, as well as the continuation of the three-year-old Loyalist cease-fire. As well as the cessation of violence in the troubled province, there were symbolic gestures aplenty during 1997. First Sinn Fein were granted permission to enter Stormont for direct face-to-face talks with the Unionists. Sinn Fein were also invited to Downing Street for an unprecedented meeting with British Prime Minister Tony Blair in the middle of December. Amongst all this dynamic activity, however, mumblings of Loyalist disillusionment could be heard in the background. It is the disaffection of its former allies which the British government now needs to address if the peace process is not to be derailed.

The trouble started when Billy Wright, founder of the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), was shot dead in the Maze Prison by members of the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), who were among his fellow prisoners. Christopher McWilliams, one of the men who was arrested for Wright's killing, told police that "Billy Wright was executed for one reason only — for directing and waging his campaign of terror against nationalist people from his prison cell." Of the 20 sectarian killings in the province in 1997, 15 have been attributed to Loyalists and many if not all of these to the LVF. From the outset it was believed that the killing would precipitate retaliation. The province then witnessed a wave of violence which has put the peace process through its severest test to date.

Immediately after the killing of Wright, LVF paramilitaries shot dead Seamus Dillon, a security guard at the Glengannon Hotel in Dungannon, County Tyrone. In the attack, five others were wounded, as the gunmen fired indiscriminately around the hotel function room. An LVF source labeled this attack as simply "a mark of respect, with more to come, either in Northern Ireland or the Republic." Any hopes that this single killing might suffice to satisfy the vendetta instinct quickly faded, as the Dungannon murder was followed by a brutal attack on a north Belfast bar on New Year's Eve, in which Eddie Treanor, a 31-year-old Catholic, was killed.

This attack moved the crisis into a new phase. The area in which the attack was carried out is not generally considered as an LVF stronghold. The organisation is relatively weak in Belfast, and it is supposed that the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) must have played a logistical role in support of the killers. Established only 16 months ago, the LVF are one of the many Loyalist splinter factions. They are not represented at the Stormont talks and indeed are generally regarded as a pariah group. However, this new development would seem to signal that since Wright's death the LVF are being welcomed back into mainstream Loyalist circles.

After all the attempts by the British government to keep the IRA cease-fire intact, it was now the Loyalist cease-fire that was under threat of being broken. Indeed, with the UDA's involvement in the New Year's Eve attack, the cease-fire had effectively come to an end. Unionists had long felt that the talks process was geared towards keeping Sinn Fein on board and that their agenda was being sacrificed in order to assuage Republican sensitivities. Following the spate of killings and the fraternal reunion of fringe and mainstream Loyalist factions, the UDA and the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) instructed their representatives at the Stormont talks, the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), to withdraw. This sufficed to inject a new sense of urgency into the proceedings.

It was in this new, fraught context, that Mo Mowlam, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, decided to enter the Maze prison to talk directly to the paramilitaries. It was a brave step for her to take and one that could easily have backfired. Mowlam said of the planned visit that "it took courage to push things forward."

After the news of the planned visit broke, Sam McCrory, leader of the five-man UDA/UFF delegation that was to meet with Mowlam inside the Maze, said: "We voted against the UDP staying in the talks. But all that could change in the next couple of days. We feel it is a courageous decision to come and speak to us. There will be no negotiations, only a conversation. We know the way forward is through dialogue, but we want a level playing-field." Mowlam herself reiterated that the meeting was to tell the prisoners that the "only way forward on issues relating to the prisoners is through dialogue and that without dialogue, they are not going to get anything."

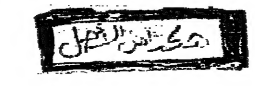
Mowlam has certainly brought a new approach to the Northern Ireland conflict since her appointment in the wake of New Labour's election victory last May. She has an instinctive grasp of the deep-rooted sensitivities of the different communities in Northern Ireland. Like Prime Minister Blair, she is willing to take risks in order to reach a comprehensive settlement and is big on symbolic gestures. It is this skill in diplomacy where other people's pride is at stake that made her visit to the Maze such an astonishing success.

After the meeting, the UDA/UFF prisoners, who had carefully left themselves just enough leeway, executed a complete U-turn, and instructed their political representatives that they would continue to back the talks process. Thus the pendulum swung once again in these turbulent negotiations which have still not managed to define precisely what is to be discussed at Castle Buildings.

The risks taken in the last few months by the British government have been spectacular. Tony Blair remarked to journalists after meeting with Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams at Downing Street that "the risk of meeting Adams was a risk worth taking." Mowlam also took a risk that was hitherto unthinkable. The lesson above all would seem to be that when taking risks for peace, it is better to be proactive rather than reactive.

The recent crisis highlights this point precisely. There is a feeling amongst many that the process has still not established a level-playing field. If Northern Ireland is to find peace in the foreseeable future, many more such risks will have to be taken. Whether these risks will be rewarded depends essentially on how much imagination is demonstrated by the people taking them.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**





Insurance companies fear for their lives

Hailed by some as a much-needed step to lure foreign investments, Egypt's signing of the WTO agreement for liberalisation of financial services has also drawn criticism that the move will be detrimental to local industries. Aziza Sami reports on the controversy

It didn't take long for representatives of the Egyptian insurance sector to raise the battle cry that liberalisation would place them at a disadvantage in the face of global competition.

The complaints voiced by these, as well as representatives of other major economic sectors in Egypt, came after Egypt's signing of the World Trade Organisation agreement for the liberalisation of financial services in December.

Under the agreement, which is due to be ratified by the end of 1999, Egypt must open up its insurance, banking and investment funds to foreigners, allowing them to be majority owners in joint-ventures in each of these three sectors.

The government has offered repeated assurances that the economy, now being reformed, is able to withstand the pressures of competition from abroad. Egypt has already signed the first part of the WTO agreement, which opened up the banking and securities industries to foreign ownership in 1995.

But both public and private sector insurance executives argue that opening up the market before the end of the WTO-prescribed three-year transitional period is just about a recipe for disaster for the country's insurance industry.

The truth of the matter, however, is that liberalisation of the insurance industry began in 1995, with the passing of Law 91. The law enables foreign equity insurance companies to be formed with up to 49 per cent foreign ownership. In a corresponding move, the prices of most insurance products were also liberalised.

Egypt's signing of the WTO accord, along with 70 of the WTO's 132 members in Geneva, has raised protests among certain sectors in the economy, especially insurance, that the pact will pave the way for liberalisation at too quick a pace. This, critics point out, will allow foreign companies, notably American firms which enjoy a competitive edge in financial services worldwide, to dominate the local market at the end of this year, before national companies can upgrade themselves to face global competition.

The agreement entails applying WTO directives to the financial services sector and putting countries which violate their commitments before an authority that settles such disputes.

The agreement has drawn mixed reactions, ranging from the government's assurance that the economy is ready to face international competition to protests by representatives of the insurance industry, both public and private sector, who say that opening the doors this year to international insurance companies, before the three-year transitional period prescribed by the WTO, can only result in negative consequences for the national insurance industry.

The US, pressed by its influential financial services industry, rejected a WTO deal in 1995 as offering inadequate commitments to liberalise the insurance sector. But battle lines seem to have been drawn between the insurance companies — both public and private — on the one hand, and the government on the other. The government is now considering privatisation of public sector insurance companies, as well as responding to WTO pressures to lift the 49 per cent ceiling on foreign investments before the end of this year. One of the four public sector insurance companies is expected to go up for sale by the end of the second quarter of 1998. Private sector insurers say that opening the doors to foreign companies before the three-year transition period prescribed by the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) will obstruct the Egyptian private sector's chance to form companies and establish themselves in the market. "You have to encourage national capital to invest in insurance, and give it, instead of the foreigner, privileges enabling it to face what will be very aggressive foreign competition," said Mounir Ghabbour, chairman of the private sector Pharaonic Insurance Company. "It is important to have a three-year transition period before lifting the 49 per cent ceiling on foreign ownership." Ghabbour said.

The problem was exacerbated by Minister of Economy Youssef Butros Ghali's statements, at several public meetings, that the insurance sector will be opened up to foreigners before the end of January 1999. The argument is that it is only liberalisation which will push the insurance sector to become more competitive and become a source of much-needed national savings. But other insurance experts share Ghabbour's view that the national industry, the long-protected public sector, as well as the private sector, must be given the opportunity to upgrade itself before becoming open to competition.

"The big question is whether to open up the market while letting the public sector companies remain and compete with foreign companies or initiate a privatisation programme for this sector," says Samir Hamza, a partner at Helmy and Hamza (Baker and Mackenzie). "Before embarking on either route, Egypt has to have an adequate number of actuary experts who are the basis for any insurance business development."

But the government seems bent on speedy liberalisation of the sector in compliance with the latest WTO agreement. The first step towards privatisation has been taken, calling for bids to evaluate one of the four public sector companies in preparation for their sale. One is expected to go on sale by the second quarter of 1998.

The cabinet approved a draft law last December which will be discussed in parliament's current session on liberalising insurance. The government's plan is to remove the 49 per cent limit on foreign ownership. Compulsory reinsurance is also to be removed, as well as citizenship requirements for managing directors of life and non-life insurance companies who, according to the current law, must be Egyptians.

In the framework of the latest WTO agreement, Egypt will also allow 51 per cent foreign investment by the year 2000 in life insurance, and the year 2003 in non-life insurance. In addition, it will allow 100 per cent foreign investments in free trade zones.

Social insurance will be excluded from the liberalisation programme, a point reiterated more than once by the minister of social affairs, given that the government is still trying to maintain a precarious balance between the needs of a free market and social demands. The position of insiders in the insurance business was expressed by Egypt's representative at the WTO, Ambassador Mounir Zahran, who described the agreement as "a one-way street which allows multinationals to grab more power. The developing economies have little choice but to accept because of much-needed investments."

Allaying fears about the consequences of the latest agreement for the banking sector, Ismail Hassan, the governor of the Central Bank of Egypt, announced that any shareholding in a bank of more than 10 per cent has to be approved by the CBE. Since there is a moratorium on banking licences for Egyptians as well as foreigners, any foreign investments in this sector would be made through the purchase of existing licences or buying into existing banks. But the Egyptian banking sector has, in effect, already been totally deregulated with the liberalisation of interest and tariffs and through offering a wide range of services related to a free market.

A new banking law issued in 1995 raised the level of foreign ownership in joint-venture banks to 49 per cent, allowing for the appointment of foreign managers and the establishment of foreign bank branches. American Express, Citibank and Credit Lyonais currently have fully-owned subsidiaries in Egypt. Experts are confident, therefore, that Egyptian banks are strong enough to face international competition. "I think Egyptian banks are prepared to compete on a one-on-one basis with any international bank which decides to establish itself here," says Mohamed Ozalp, senior general manager of Misr International Bank (MIBank). "Any purchasing of any equity share in an Egyptian bank of more than 10 per cent has to have prior approval of the Central Bank. These are regulations which are perfectly normal in any country due to the sensitivity of the banking sector." Ozalp added.

But not all banking experts are enthusiastic over the prospect of foreign banks operating freely in Egypt. Some see the new agreement as one more step in the speeding up of liberalisation, creating a greater dependence on advanced economies. "If banks are to be privatised, it is to be for Egyptians," says Hassan Abbas Zaki, board member of the CBE and former minister of the economy. Zaki says that foreign ownership of banks will be one more factor subjecting the economy to the fluctuations of global finance.

In the stock market, the WTO agreement has so far met with little reaction since several foreign funds are already operating in the market, subscribing in stocks and bonds and looking into companies for sale.

According to the WTO agreement, Egypt is committed to opening its market to foreign investors to establish and fully own securities companies. Foreign firms have the right to establish and own majority stakes in local companies and have the full right to be treated on an equal footing with national companies.

Despite the importance of the agreement, most stock brokers and workers in the capital market are still ignorant of its terms and the consequences of its implementation. But Ali El-Tahri, managing director of EFG Hermes, a financial group with brokerage, investment banking and fund-management activities, welcomed the agreement, saying that opening the doors to increased foreign presence will benefit the local market, boost investments and improve the overall investment atmosphere. El-Tahri criticised the view that closing the market in the face of foreign investments is a way of protection against speculation. "As long as there is investment, there must be speculation. Even those entering the market for speculation will shift to longer term investments if they find the investment environment and market-yield satisfying."

Additional reporting by ***Shereen Abdel-Razek***

Textile wars

Do GATT/WTO agreements menace the survival of the Egyptian textile industry? Not if textile manufacturers know what's good for them, writes Essam Rifaat

Egypt is a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Previously, it had signed the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in April 1994, and it has been a GATT member since May 1970. Egypt has also taken the necessary constitutional measures to secure approval of the GATT agreement and the issuance of a law to that effect.

As a member of GATT/WTO, Egypt is under legal obligation to implement all aspects of the multilateral agreements (there are 28 agreements besides the general GATT agreement). In other words, members of GATT are bound by certain commitments and entitled to specific rights. Moreover, members cannot implement some articles of the agreement and ignore others. It is all or nothing.

The Ministry of Trade has recently issued a decree to liberalise trade in textiles in accordance with Egypt's obligations under the GATT agreement. The move was met with mixed reactions reflecting the different interests of Egyptian textile importers and producers as well as the country's clothing producers.

Clothing producers welcomed the decree because it will enable them to import high quality textiles at lower prices. This in turn will improve their production lines, thus enabling them to compete more effectively in international markets. Textile importers also approved of the new decree because it will enable them to import new products which were previously off limits. At the other end of the spectrum, Port Said's free-zone traders expressed concern over the new decree because they have been importing textiles without being subject to import duties or quota restrictions since the free-zone came into force in 1976. These traders are now demanding exemption from the new regulations. Egyptian textile manufacturers are of a similar view to that of Port Said's traders. They believe that they will not be able to match the competition from foreign suppliers who will now gain access to domestic markets. They are therefore demanding a rehabilitation period.

Yet despite all these counter-arguments, Egypt's commitments under GATT clearly require a controlled relaxation of trade restrictions in textiles. The onus is now on the domestic industry to face up to the new competition by upgrading products and lowering production costs. In any case, the new decree does not authorise unrestricted imports without specific disciplines to protect domestic industries.

Egypt cannot possibly put the Egyptian textile industry, the country's leading industry, at risk in its efforts to liberalise textile imports. The textile industry in Egypt has enjoyed protection for many years and it now seems that it is resisting change as though its life depended on it.

Some say that the textile war is now on, but, in the final analysis, trade liberalisation is not incompatible with the protection of industries. The Egyptian industrial sector must realise that real protection lies in higher quality and access to foreign markets.

The writer is editor-in-chief of the economic weekly magazine Al-Ahram Iktisadi.

The queue gets longer at 'the men's market'

Private sector growth remains too slow and too capital intensive to absorb the country's unemployed, whose ranks are swelling daily under the effects of economic deregulation. Fatemah Farag investigates the scale of the problem, safety nets and long-term plans

Crouched on a pavement at a busy intersection in the Cairo working class district of El-Zawya El-Hamra are some of the men that Egypt's structural adjustment and economic reform programme forgot.

Every day, in the chill of early morning, scores of these men gather in what has come to be known as "the men's market" — a nondescript corner where the only commodity for sale is labour.

There are dozens of corners like this one around Cairo, each offering a meagre shot at a day's wage, and each manned by unemployed workers whose ranks, analysts say, grow daily, despite efforts to revamp the economy and breakup the decades-old public sector monopoly.

With Egypt's population edging closer to the 70 million mark, Nader Fergany, director of the independent Almishkat Centre for Research, can't help but paint a bleak picture of the future.

To cope with future labour demands, about 450,000 new jobs must be created per year for the next 10 years. In addition, another 250,000 jobs per year over the same period must be created for the presently unemployed, said Fergany. Therefore, to meet this ideal goal of 700,000 jobs per year, the country's GDP has to grow at an incredible 44 per cent — an exceedingly ambitious figure by any standard.

But unemployment has been a problem for decades and, since the 1950s, several steps have been taken to reduce the jobless figures.

A recent study by Cairo University economist Nagwa El-Ahwani revealed that since 1960 the employment structure, and corresponding levels of unemployment, have undergone drastic changes that can be divided into three main stages.

In the first phase — from 1960-1973 — unemployment averaged 2.2 per cent. The study found that unemployment rates were low during this 13-year period because the public and government sectors were expanding their hiring and new graduates were guaranteed jobs.

The second phase — from 1973-1985 — was characterised by the absorption of labour into the booming construction sector, which accounted for about 22 per cent of job opportunities. Also at work were the country's informal sector and the fact that many workers left for jobs in Gulf Arab countries. Unemployment during that period increased to seven per cent, but was still under control.

But during the third phase — from 1985-1991 — unemployment took a turn for the worse. As the economy fell into a slump during the early '80s, and government employment experienced a similar decline, the number of job seekers increased beyond what the market could easily absorb.

The government's structural adjustment programme, launched together with the economic reforms of the early 1990s, posed two main problems for the labour sector. While these programmes sought to revamp the economy, making it more productive and efficient, the push for privatisation forced workers — and employers — to deal with new issues such as shutting down factories or early retirement packages.

Similarly, industrial cities, such as 6th of October, were gaining prominence with their modern factories. These factories, however, required skilled workers.

Other factors were also at play during this period, such as the Gulf War, a tourism industry that slumped because of internal and external political tensions and declining revenues from the Suez Canal.

According to a 1991 World Bank study, 450,000 Egyptian workers and their families returned home as a result of the Gulf War. Their return alone accounted for a three to four per cent increase in unemployment figures.

Attia Attia spent 10 years in Saudi Arabia as a construction worker before being pushed out of his job five years ago by a cheaper Asian labour force. Now, he stands in the men's market waiting for work.

"I wanted to get married and help my family," said Attia, explaining that Saudi Arabia "offered a great opportunity".

But since returning to Egypt five years ago, Attia has been looking for a job. He has taken up some temporary work, but those jobs never lasted. In the process, he spent all his savings. The men's market is the only opportunity left.

With the gravity of the unemployment situation well entrenched in the government's mind, solutions are already being sought. Just last week, a Ministerial Work Group was set up and charged with the study of the job market and its requirements.

The Social Fund for Development (SFD) has set up two labour programmes considered to be an integral part of the structural adjustment programme.

The first, the Labour Mobilisation Programme, includes early retirement plans and the training and re-training of workers to accommodate changing market needs.

The early retirement plan is considered "a closed file — finished," said Mohamed Hussein, an official with the General Egyptian Federation for Trade Unions (GEFTU).

In March 1996, GEFTU signed an agreement with the government and the SFD, leaving the latter and the employer responsible for paying the minimum early retirement benefits — figures which range from LE12,000 to LE35,000.

This programme has helped the government privatise factories and companies, but has also left some recipients disgruntled.

"I took the LE20,000 they offered me because I figured it was a good deal," said Mohamed Sobhi, who used to work at the Nasr Automotive Company — one of the first firms to start up an early retirement programme.

Sobhi took the money and opened a cigarette kiosk.

"The kiosk doesn't bring in money, and I've spent what was left of the money on day-to-day needs," he said.

Other workers, fearing a fate similar to that of Sobhi, have lashed out against the programme. Employees at some factories such as the Helwan Spinning and Weaving Textiles Factory, where production has been halted by management fear the possibility that they would lose their jobs.

Their cause, however, has little backing, as the GEFTU has given its stamp of approval to the privatisation programme.

The second SFD project is the Micro-Enterprise Stimulation Programme, which has come under fire by the very experts who argued that such a strategy could help in reducing unemployment.

"This [programme] is useful only if carried out with a comprehensive framework of training and re-training, as well as supporting businesses operating in a competitive environment and which don't receive the incentives afforded to big business," said Al-Mishkat's Fergany.

While the public sector has been slimming down its labour force, the private sector theoretically should have stepped in and hired. But the Al-Mishkat study shows that private sector development, since the early 1980s, has been more capital intensive than labour intensive.

Cairo University's Ahwany reached a similar conclusion in her study, which revealed that private sector contributions to industrial investment and employment were lower than expected.

For example, between 1988-89, private sector investment accounted for only 21-27 per cent of total investments, and only about 700,000 new jobs were created between 1990-1995, according to the study conducted by Al-Mishkat.

"This means that only a small percentage of people entering the job market were able to benefit from the creation of high-paying jobs in the private sector," said Fergany. "The rest, due to the glut, were forced to accept low-paying jobs."

But if unemployment is a sweeping problem touching virtually every sector of the economy, then who suffers the most?

The most recent government statistics reveal that those hardest hit are the poor. Women come in a close second, with unemployment figures nearly double that for men. Workers with only a secondary or primary school education come next, followed by those with a higher education.

A May 1997 report on poverty in the Arab world, prepared by the United Nations Development Programme, argues that the poor are neither able to seize new opportunities, nor are they included in previously-established safety nets.

The situation seems likely to get worse before it gets better. Experts argue that the recent implementation of an agricultural reform and land rental law, coupled with the capital development of agricultural enterprises, is expected to push hundreds of thousands more workers out of their jobs.

In a bid to deal with this problem, the General Syndicate for Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Resources announced last October the implementation of the first phase of a re-training project aimed at providing some 10,000 agricultural workers with the skills necessary to find work in the country's Toshka project in southern Egypt.

But the programme, too, has been met with scepticism as critics argue that it is too capital intensive.

What needs to be done, say experts and analysts, is to change the educational and vocational training systems. El-Ahwani points out that "mismatching" between market needs and education is a major weakness in the government's employment policy.

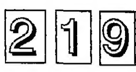
The Ministerial Committee — headed by Economy Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali — has announced that its priorities include obtaining detailed statistics reflecting the present situation of the job market as a pre-requisite to discerning the necessary changes which must be made in curricula and educational systems. But reforming the educational system is no easy feat, not to speak of the time such reforms, when implemented, will take before they have any substantial effect on the job market.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Al-Ahram Weekly

5 - 11 February 1998

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life



Physical education in Egyptian schools was introduced in the early years of the 20th century at the behest of Mr Dunlop, the British secretary of the Education Ministry who devised new school curricula. *Al-Ahram* initially attacked the physical education idea on the grounds that some sports caused inter-school friction. But the newspaper reversed its position a few years later and opened its pages to numerous articles about the benefits of sports, arguing that "a sound mind requires a sound body." Dr Yunan Labib Rizk tells the story on the basis of reports and articles published in *Al-Ahram*



Illustration: Makram Henein



Ahmed Shawki

In February 1902, *Al-Ahram* attacked the policy of Mr Dunlop, the British secretary to the Egyptian Ministry of Education, for what it considered the unacceptable innovation he introduced into the Egyptian school system — *physical education. This novelty*, the newspaper argued, threatened to spread hostility between the various schools, as could be attested to by the fight that broke out between the students of Tanta and Mansoura schools following a football match.

The famous poet, Ahmed Shawki, was of a similar conviction. In *Farewell Lord Cromer*, a poem he wrote on the occasion of the end of the British High Commissioner's tour of duty in Egypt in 1907, he wrote:

Is it a sign of your munificence to our schools that they abandoned sciences and took up football?

Within three years, however, general thinking changed considerably. The shift in attitude was reflected in *Al-Ahram* which, in 1910, featured two front-page articles on "physical exercise". The first, "Types of physical exercise and their benefits," appearing on 25 November, advised readers, "It stimulates the circulation of blood, assists the digestive process, removes excess fat and benefits the nervous system. It is essential for people in general, particularly those involved in intellectual activities: Therefore, it has been introduced into most schools and colleges in England and Germany and it has even developed into a branch of studies."

The author listed numerous sports and their benefits. Walking "at a pace of 60 to 80 steps per minute" was one of the most beneficial forms of physical exercise. Running was "the best means to expand the chest and assist the lungs in performing their function effortlessly," on the condition that the runner was careful to adhere to the proper posture. Jumping "up and down or backwards and forwards" was important for "building courage, flexibility and composure" and improved the ability to judge distances. Nothing was better than dancing for "improving posture, acquiring better deportment and building strength." He cautioned, however, that "the waltz, so popular in Europe, causes dizziness and nausea," and that "people afflicted with tuberculosis and anaemia should refrain from dancing completely." Swimming exercised all muscles uniformly, "but swimmers must take care to have di*gested their food and not to remain in* the water for long periods of time, particularly at the beginning. Should a cramp occur, swimmers should remain calm and float on their back without thrashing."

The author recommended three other forms of sports that were popular at the time: horse-riding which "improves digestion, stimulates blood circulation and strengthens the lungs", fencing which "stimulates blood circulation, strengthens the lungs and builds muscles", and cycling "which activates the entire nervous system." Oddly, football and tennis were put at the end of the list, perhaps for considerations of inter-school rivalry. The author concludes, "Lest we forget, a sound mind requires a sound body and regular exercise is the best means to maintain the strength of the body and, therefore, the vigour of the mind."

The second article, appearing in December that year, was entitled, "Physical exercise and breathing". Human beings, the author tells *Al-Ahram's* readers, take an average of 14 to 16 breaths per minute. "It is preferable to inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth, for this permits air to be warmed in the nasal cavities before it reaches the lungs." After listing a few breathing exercises, he added that healthy breathing helped prevent disease, particularly tuberculosis, which was widespread at the time. Scientists, he said, have noted that this disease was "less common among soldiers who play in the military bands in light of the breath control their instruments require."

So well received were these articles that, from late December 1910 through the following year, *Al-Ahram* featured a series of 12 articles by the author of *Sound Body*, Dr Tawfik Sousa. Indeed, so confident were the editors in the series' ability to attract readership that they appeared on Fridays, the weekend for most people.

The series began with several articles on cleanliness. Sousa begins with several famous quotes: "Human beings and filth do not accord: where the latter grows the former weakens", "The unclean man is prey to permanent discomfort", and, finally the Arab *adage, "Cleanliness is a tenet of* faith."

According to scientists, he says, the sweat and fatty substances secreted by our thousands of skin pores help rid the body of waste products, more so than the lungs and kidneys. Should this process be blocked, a person could die, "as scientists in Europe have proved by painting a horse with tar, causing it to die of suffocation." Indeed one observes, he adds, that most animals spend a large portion of their lives cleaning their skin, "to the extent that nature enables them to do so".

Proper skin care through regular bathing was essential to sound health. He advised bathing in cold water at a temperature of between 8 to 16 degrees centigrade, regardless of the season.

He adds, "Cold water increases the number of red blood corpuscles in the blood, and although body temperature may decrease initially, in the course of the counter response, the body's temperature is raised by a full degree, particularly if the bather performs some physical exercises."

On the other hand, Sousa cautioned against public bathhouses, or "Oriental baths" as he called them. While the steam helped the body secrete waste substances from the lungs and kidneys, the public baths "can cause dizziness and extreme faintness as the temperatures vary from 40 to 60 degrees, after which the body is subjected to a hot water bath and then a lengthy period of repose in order to permit the body to undergo the reaction."

One article was devoted to proper clothing. While not as essential as food, water and sleep, Sousa considered attention to clothing and particularly to fabrics an important ingredient for the maintenance of sound health. He warned, for example, that "some dyes contain toxic substances that are harmful to the dyer and to the people who wear the clothes that had been immersed in those dyes."

The doctor then addressed how clothes function in relation to heat. In cold climates, "clothes are made to absorb the rays of the sun through the gaps between the woven fibers and the air trapped between the clothes and skin helps preserve body heat." As for warmer climates, the best fabric to wear was cotton for "its capacity to reduce body heat." At the same time, "loosely woven fabrics, regardless of their colour, are superior to tightly woven fabrics for absorbing moisture on the skin and perspiration."

The remainder of Sousa's series was devoted to food and nourishment. He devoted two articles to milk and dairy products. Apart from mother's milk, he said other important sources for milk were cows, sheep and donkeys. Indeed, *Al-Ahram's* readers may have been surprised to learn that, of these three, donkeys' milk was the closest in composition to mother's milk. Milk derivatives, he writes, are produced "when milk is exposed to the air, permitting the cream to form on the surface. By churning the milk one produces butter and by allowing the protein substances to coagulate one can produce cheese." Milk contains a variety of nutrients that are sufficient to nourish infants and help them grow. Of course, in an age before refrigerators were invented, Sousa also needed to discuss spoilage and he advises readers to add a gram of boric acid per litre to keep milk from spoiling. He also offers advice to readers when buying milk. In order to test whether the milk seller is cheating them, consumers should first taste the milk to see if it has been diluted with water and, secondly, if they have a scale available, they should weigh it: "a litre of milk diluted with water is lighter than a litre of whole milk."

One of the most beneficial milk products was curdled milk, which could be made with "a special yeast". Curdled milk, he notes, "is easier to digest than ordinary milk. In addition, it is a diuretic, it cleanses the intestines and it has a high nutrient value. Also, it is known to have great curative effects on diabetes and some stomach disorders."

Turning to cheeses, Sousa lists six kinds: Roquefort, Gruyere, Edam, Brie, Camembert and Cheddar. Although all of these were European brands, he was not about to ignore locally produced cheeses. The most important was *gibna qarish* or cottage cheese: "After the farmers milk their cows, generally after sunset, they remove the cream and put the milk in a water skin which they leave suspended in the air for several days. After churning the cream to make butter, they take the remaining butter milk which they put on a low heat until it produces whey. Then they mix the whey and the curds together, put them on a straw mat and allow the mixture to drain, after which they add salt and cut up the cheese in sizes according to demand."

Even today's readers may find Sousa's chapter on meats useful. Among the most commonly eaten meats were beef, water buffalo, lamb, pork, camel meat and, more rarely horse meat. Other sources of meet could be obtained from rabbits, wild boar and various types of fowl. He also provided a schedule for the optimum ages at which these animals should be slaughtered for their meat: "bulls between 3 and 6 years old, cows less than 3 years old, calves at 6 weeks, sheep between one and a half and two years." Contrary to readers expectations, he notes, the most expensive cuts of meat, such as fillet, do not have any greater nutrient value than less expensive cuts.

Another article in his series was devoted to eggs. He provides *Al-Ahram* readers with some scientific insight by offering a breakdown of the composition of the average chicken egg. This, he said, weighs approximately 50 grams, of which the shell is six grams, the yolk is eight grams and the white is 36 grams. Clearly, he was describing the locally produced farm eggs rather than the modern "Grade A Large" battery-produced eggs of modern times.

The doctor also took occasion to warn readers against the wiles of the egg sellers of the times. "Chickens produce more eggs at the beginning of spring and the end of summer. Due to the increase of supply, the prices of eggs should drop in these seasons. However, to keep the prices from dropping, poultry farmers and egg merchants withhold a portion of the produce and store it away for the low seasons. Therefore, not only can we not find cheap eggs when they are in season, but we have to eat expensive, old eggs in the winter!"

In the last article of his series, Sousa turns to bread. "It is to the Ancient Egyptians that the world owes the invention of the method of baking bread. It is from Egypt that the Jews learned this art and from Egypt that it spread to Asia and then to Greece and Rome."

Even then, health-conscious Egyptians must have asked which is healthier, white bread or dark bread, for Sousa addresses this question next. His answer might come as a surprise to modern nutritionists, for he says, "Experiments have shown that white bread is better and that the bran should be left to ruminants." Finally, he says that "a person can survive quite well on a kilogramme of bread and a litre of water per day" and concludes that this may have prompted the well-known adage, that "man can live on bread alone."

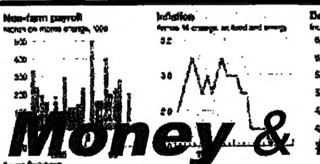
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



CeBIT 98 in Hannover

CEBIT 98 will take place in Hannover, Germany, from 19-25 March 1998. CeBIT is considered the number one exhibition for electronics, computers, software and telecommunications in the world. In 1997, the exhibition received 600 thousand visitors from all parts of the world. This year, over 7,300 exhibitors will participate, approximately 2,763 of whom are from outside Germany.

The exhibition will offer the latest in the following specialised fields, including information technology, network computing, computer integrated management, Internet, intranet and extranet technologies, telecommunications, office automation, bank technology, security equipment/ card technology and research and technology transfer.



Volume of trade with Sudan expected to increase

WHILE the volume of trade between Egypt and Sudan witnessed a steady decline during the period from 1992-1995 due to the the ceasing of protocol activity, falling from LE226 million in 1992 to LE92 million in 1995, trade activity began moving upwards to reach LE142 million in 1996, and recorded LE98 million during the first half of 1997.

A source at the Commercial Representation Office said that as political and economic ties between the two countries begin to improve, something which the forthcoming period is expected to witness, so too will the amount of commercial activity. Major Egyptian exports to Sudan include foodstuffs and petroleum products.

Preliminary meeting for the Sixth ACITEX Exhibition

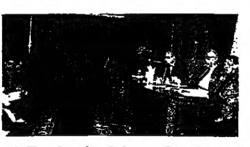
A PRELIMINARY meeting attended by sponsors and exhibitors of the Sixth Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition (ACITEX) took place on Monday, 26 January 1998, during which the final details concerning the exhibition, including opening night invitations, entry passes for exhibitors and visitors, and automobile entry passes to the Conference Centre's grounds were made. Additional details concerning the electrical requirements of each pavilion were also discussed, in addition to the special seminars that some companies will be holding on the sidelines of the exhibition.

Cairo International Conference Centre representatives participating in the meeting included: Samih Aglan, managing director of security and Abdel-Moneim Higazi, general exhibition manager, who both made a big impact on the success of co-ordinating between organisers and officials of the Cairo International Conference Centre.

Sponsors of ACITEX 98 include: IBM, Computer Consultant Group (CCG), Hi-Tech, ProTrade, Banque Misr, Xerox, National Bank of Egypt and Knowlogy International.

Exhibiting companies include:

Advanced Technology Systems (ATS) Est., Al-Ahram Management and Computer Centre (AMAC), Al-Badr for Electronics and Computers, Al-Magd Trade and Services, Al-Motahida Software, Al-Mukhtar Import and Export for Commercial Agents (NEXAR), Al-Wady Computer Services, Apple Care, Apple Line, Arabian American Computers and Systems Development Company, Better Business, Business Express, Cairo Computer, CeBIT, Compudream, Compu-House Computers, Compuscience, Computer and Engineering World, Computer Consulting and Supplies, Computer Scientific Company, Computrack, Computrend for Computers and Electronic Systems, Crystal Mind Computer Solutions, CSA Computers, Daltix Information Technology, Data Bank Computers, Deutsch-Arabische Handel Skammer (SYSTEMS), Diamond Computer and Trading, Dimension for Trading and Supplies, EgyComp, EgyGate, Egyptian Engineering Computer Company, EGYTECH, El-Arabi Co. for Trading and Manufacturing, El-Ghandour Est., El-Shorouk Trading, El-Tawil International Trade, ElectroServ, Esteshar-ia for Electronics and Computers, FAX Computer Systems., Fouda Co. Ltd, Future Soft, Gamma Electronics, Glory Tech, Hadeya for Arabic Software, Heart Computer Services, Hi-Tec Zone, Horizon Development, Integral for Computers and Communications, Integrated Trading Centre, International Computer and Services, International Electronics Centre, Kady International Trading Company, KME CompuTools, Laser Misr, Legend System Misr, Manf Trading House, Mega Group, Micro Hard, Microsoft, Misr Computer Company, Moroge, Multi Media Egypt, NCC Golden Games Centre, NETLINE, Office Automation, Office Information Systems (OFIS), Omega Marketing Company, Optimum Media Egypt, Overseas Computers, Powerline, ProComp, ProLine Egypt, RAM, Sakhr Al-Ahram Computers, SANA Computers and Electronics, SATEE for Art and Design Computer Centre, Scientific Centre for Computers, Research and Development International (RDI), TAG Computer Centre, TC Comp, UBC for Trading and Engineering, Ultra Trade, United Engineers Computer Systems (UNI Comp), United for Computer and Office Equipment and Universe.



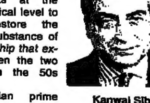
Ali Ghoneim, vice chairman of the board of Al-Ahram Establishment and general manager of AMAC; Hassan Hamdi, general manager of *Al-Ahram*'s Advertising Department and supervisor of Pyramids Advertising Agency; and Mohamed Youssef Habib, ACITEX supervisor, *during the meeting with sponsors* and exhibitors

A message from the Indian ambassador to Egypt on the occasion of India's Republic Day

THE 26th of January, 1998, marks the 48th anniversary of the founding of the Indian Republic. It is on this day in 1950 that India adopted its Constitution which is the bedrock of its democracy and secularism. Our Constitution embodies the profound vision and the lofty principles that animated the great leaders of India's freedom struggle like Mahatma Ghandi and Jawaharal Nehru. They foresaw that India's multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society could be best governed and the legitimate interests of all groups best protected if the people of India enjoyed the widest possible freedoms and the State was not associated with any religion. After long *years of repressive foreign rule, the leaders of* India wanted to guarantee to their people all fundamental rights and freedoms protected by an independent judiciary and the rule of law.

The spirit and pluralism, consensus and attachment to freedom that permeates the Indian Constitution also defines India's policies, both domestic and foreign. Externally, India has steadfastly worked for international peace and understanding, for co-existence, avoidance of conflict, racial equality, freedom from colonial rule and disarmament. India's long-standing and generous support for Arab causes, especially the Palestinian cause, has been an integral part of its wider political philosophy.

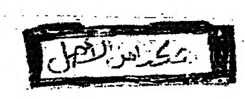
India's relations with Egypt have always been marked by deep friendship and understanding. In the 1950s and 60s, India and Egypt were in the forefront together on all the great issues of the day. Together, they founded the Non-Aligned Movement which has since grown into the largest gathering of nations outside the United Nations Organisation itself. Indo-Egyptian relations stand on strong foundations. In the last few years there have been efforts at the highest political level to steadily restore the spirit and substance of *the relationship that ex*isted between the two countries in the 50s and 60s.

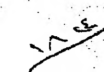


Kanwal Sibal
Ambassador of India to Egypt

Two Indian prime ministers have visited Egypt in the last couple of years. Several key agreements have been signed to provide a stronger institutional framework to our bilateral relations. Foreign Minister Moussa visited India last year for the meeting of the Indo-Egyptian Joint Commission, convened after a gap of 8 years. Trade Minister Guweili has visited India earlier this month as part of efforts by both countries to expand trade and com*mercial ties, with greater involvement* of the private sector. Our mutual trade is growing and Indian firms have begun to increasingly invest in Egypt, which is fast becoming a credible growing market. The exclusive Indian exhibition at the Cairo International Conference Centre from 15-19 April this year will be another step forward in our efforts to strengthen our trade ties.

India enjoys much goodwill amongst the Egyptians. Apart from political understanding and cultural affinities that exist, the Egyptian press has played a positive role in nurturing friendly sentiments towards India. I sincerely thank the contribution made by *Al-Ahram* to the promotion of Indo-Egyptian ties of friendship and cooperation.







Compromise for deterrence

Conventional and nuclear capabilities mean little when it comes to peace, writes Amin Hewedy. At best, we can hope for a stability based on compromise



In 1904, shortly before his death, Theodor Herzl warned of two dangers to Israel: "men of religion and men of war." Having established the state of Israel, he wrote, both groups would attempt to control it, thus leading to the collapse of its secular basis.

If he could see Netanyahu, Herzl would be spinning in his grave. Under pressure from a racist minority, the two main parties are incapable of forming a government which represents the majority. A coalition, described by Shimon Peres as a government of dissidence in which the opinion of the racist minority controls the colonialist majority, has been the inevitable result. Yet it is the military-industrial complex that actually rules.

The combined power of the Arab states far exceeds that of Israel, except in the military field. Yet Israel has imposed its strategic objectives on the Arab states. Israel has thus been capable of emphasising the economic benefits of peace, while sidestepping the political means of achieving it.

Clausewitz's assertion that war is the pursuit of politics by other means has been rendered obsolete by the nuclear deterrent, which allows only complete, mutual annihilation. On the regional level, however, it is still possible to resort to force in imposing realities in complete contradiction with the inhabitants' historical rights. Israel is building settlements, roads and bridges — in a word, transforming the landscape and the composition of the population. It imports Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe to inhabit the land, and subsidises them with funds provided by the US.

In order to implement this transformation, Israel draws world attention to other, minor, hostilities. The tunnel under Al-Aqsa is a good example of this policy. The Arabs focused on it exclusively, precisely as Ariel Sharon, the Israeli minister for infrastructure, was busy changing the geographic and demographic maps. Bulldozers are the ultimate policy-makers: when the time comes for negotiations, there will be nothing to discuss. The Doha summit also sidetracked the Arabs, who should have focused on the peace negotiations, and the implementation of previous agreements.

The Arabs enjoy certain geographical and strategic advantages which would allow them to absorb a first strike before launching a counter-offensive. They also have facilities from which to launch strategic surprise attacks.

Fighting capability, however, is not determined solely by weapons; the army and its leadership also constitute crucial factors. Technology does not guarantee superiority. It is the ability to use it correctly that is the decisive criterion.

If a balance of power prevails, the parties to a conflict are unable to resort to force. If they are compelled to do so, fighting will be restricted to a minimum, and the parties will be far more inclined to settle their differences at the negotiating table. But in the current situation, Israel is able to act as it pleases, while impeding the actions of its enemies. It can impose unjust, incomplete settlements, which reflect its preponderant power, not a balance of interests. Settlements of this sort are short-lived, because they are tolerated only by those who agreed to them. They discount the needs of future generations, and fail to engender any sense of security or safety.

Due to its overwhelming monopoly of military capabilities, Israel is also able to insist on its security needs at the expense of others. Israel, in other words, cares neither for the past nor for the future. Israel, however, uses the deterrence principle as a pretext for the use of force.

The current situation is truly unusual. The Arabs enjoy numerical superiority, but they have no vitality; to use a somewhat overblown metaphor, they are like a dragon without claws or fangs. They have the means to deter aggression, but they lack the will to use them.

The means of deterrence are not as important as the result. A suicide bomber is as powerful a deterrent as an air raid. Determination makes up for inferiority in actual deterrence capabilities. In fact, the inferior party often appears more credible — a crucial factor in the deterrence equation. A bomb represents a more immediate deterrent than a nuclear weapon.

Chemical and biological weapons and conventional arsenals are capable of deterring each other, but stones, Molotov cocktails and suicide bombers are paradoxically far more powerful deterrents than either of these. This is partly because the deterrent used must be appropriate in order to be effective. A students' strike is not dealt with through bombs. Similarly, stone-throwing children are not deterred by tanks.

The second Arab summit, held in Alexandria in 1964, marked the beginning of concerted Arab action against Israel. In addition to other task forces, a group was assigned the responsibility of studying Israel's efforts to divert the Jordan River from its course. An Arab task group for the construction of the necessary embankments was also established. Subsequently, Israel announced it was putting an end to the project. Since then, the Arabs have been able to achieve consensus, but have never been capable of implementing their decisions.

After the 1973 War, Israel chose to interpret any agreements with the Arabs on its own terms. It relied on the fact that the Arabs in general, and Arafat's regime in particular, usually complain for a while, then return to the negotiating table. Its strategy may be summed up as follows.

Israel usually establishes a distinction between political agreements and security measures, which must be in Israel's favour at the time of implementation. When it has shown flexibility in a political agreement, Israel reverses any concessions it may have made within what it calls "safe borders", a policy which often entails the violation of other countries' sovereignty.

Israel carries out changes in topography and demography in order to guarantee its "security", even at the price of the security of other countries. It will agree to a dialogue on geography only after it has established a status quo. It can also create problems in order to enforce a new reality and change the nature of the crisis. The Al-Aqsa tunnel and Jebel Abu Ghneim provide a good example of such measures.

Israel does not consider agreements and time-tables binding. Only security measures determine policy implementation.

The West Bank comes first as far as Israeli security is concerned. It shares borders with Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. On the far east is Iraq, a constant reminder that Israel was targeted by Saddam Hussein's Scud missiles. There are 10,000 Israelis in settlements east of the Green Line. If an agreement is to be concluded, it will be necessary to draw up complex plans for the deployment of forces. Moreover, there are Jewish holy sites and water resources in the West Bank, which also controls all roads leading to Palestine on the Iraqi side, as well as the three bridges on the Jordan River. For these reasons, Israel may make concessions over Gaza, but the West Bank is a more difficult area.

Given the Arabs' numerical superiority, Israel depends on qualitative dominance: its conventional-plus arsenal, nuclear missiles, insistence on engaging only one of the Arab forces at a time, the superiority of its leadership, the continuous training of its forces, the exclusion of the defence army from domestic security operations, and Israel's dependence on US or UN support.

Israel's main strength, however, lies in its ability to impose "deterrence by conjecture": intimidating its enemies into surmising that it owns a vast arsenal and can wipe them out with a single blow. Since its possession of this arsenal is not actually confirmed, however, it is not subject to arms inspections or other interventions on the part of the international community. This leaves us with several possibilities:

Israel actually possesses several nuclear warheads as well as the means to launch them immediately; it is keeping these warheads in stock, ready to be assembled and launched in a short time; it possesses the know-how, but has not actually manufactured the warheads.

Whatever the case may be, the possibility that Israel is a full-fledged nuclear power must be taken into account; more importantly, however, this possibility arouses sufficient fear in its enemies to keep them quiet.

Israel will not tolerate the same policy on the part of the Arabs; furthermore, it disregards the laws regulating warfare if these laws prevent it from attaining its objectives.

From the above it is clear that only a "balance of deterrence" can achieve a just and lasting peace in the region. This will only be achieved through the power to impose punitive action, and the determination to use that power. The ability to deliver the second blow prevents the enemy from striking.

Several concrete possibilities must be taken into consideration at this juncture. If an alliance is established between Israel, Jordan and Palestine, it may serve as a wedge driven through the Arab world, or a barrier to isolate Syria from the north. On the other hand, it could form a nucleus which will encourage other states to establish cooperation accords. Finally, it could allow Israel to turn its energies to the rest of the region.

The problem of Jerusalem can be resolved, either through the extension of its borders or through joint religious councils; but the issue of sovereignty must not be broached. This phase of the negotiations may extend into the early years of the next century, at which point Israel will withdraw within, not from, the Golan Heights. Joint patrols will be formed in Jebel Al-Sheikh, and an effort made to secure the sources of the Jordan River. Concurrently, the main Syrian forces will withdraw to the west of Damascus, and the army will be downsized. The Israeli forces will withdraw from southern Lebanon, while securing it from within Israel. This, at least, is Israel's conceptual map at present.

At issue now is the role of the Israeli forces in the implementation of this map on the ground. Will their task be limited to acts of deterrence? Will Israel engage in a small battle in southern Lebanon? Or will it launch a full-scale war against Syria? If the Arabs remain in their cocoon, deterrence alone will suffice to set the bulldozers in motion once more. If the Palestinians content themselves with suicide bombers, stones and the boycott, the PNA will have to choose between complete surrender to Israeli terms and suicide through a new Intifada. If Syria takes an active stance, the result will be a direct conflict, which, so far, all the parties have attempted to avert.

Regional stability will not be realised through nuclear or conventional force. It can, however, be achieved as a "compromise stability", which will fail to satisfy any of the parties fully. It must be based on a balance of interests, not merely a balance of power. If this is to be achieved, the will to employ force and the causes of instability must be eliminated, not merely contained.

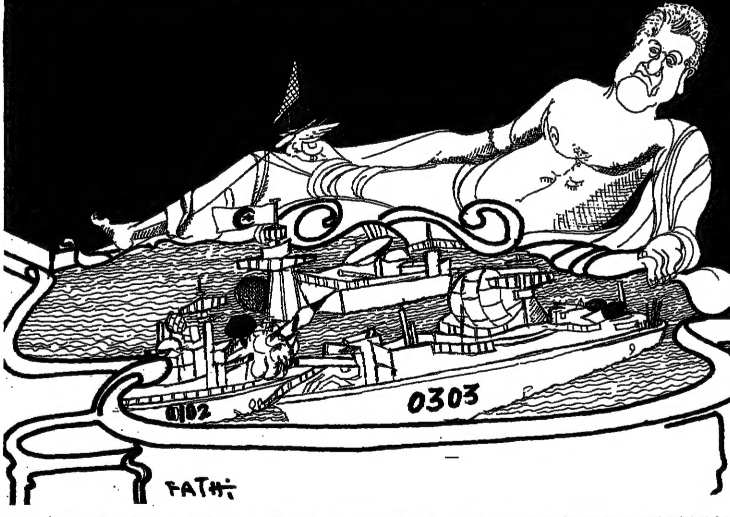
The 1947 partition plan is now once again on the table. We need to dwell on this plan, endeavour to understand it better and introduce reasonable modifications capable of satisfying most of the parties' demands. Violence and resentment have brought us back to square one. To revert to the truth, even a partial truth, is better than ignoring it altogether.

The writer is a former minister of defence and chief of General Intelligence.

Apology: The Weekly *regrets that, due to a technical error in the printing process, parts of this article as it appeared in last week's issue were blurred and illegible. We are therefore reprinting it here.*

Citadel or jail?

Turkish-Israeli military manoeuvres signal a step forward in the move from dual to total containment. Ahmed Abdel-Halim reviews US policy in the region



One must not take the recent US-Turkish-Israeli manoeuvres in the eastern Mediterranean at face value, whether in terms of the reasons cited for conducting them or as a potential military axis against Syria. Their implications are far more profound. A closer reading reveals a crucial shift in US strategy and policy toward the Middle East, and the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular: to wit, a return to the policy of "containment".

The US first implemented a containment policy against the Soviet Union in 1948, shortly after the end of World War II, when it determined that it could no longer cooperate with its former ally. The "dual containment" version of this policy was applied against Iran and Iraq in May 1993. Today, this declared, specifically targeted policy of containment has become an undeclared, comprehensive policy, which I have termed "total containment".

George Kennan was the architect of the US policy of containment as applied to the Soviet Union. A foreign service officer with extensive experience in the Soviet Union, Kennan provided the intellectual foundations for the policy, then called the Truman Doctrine. By early 1947, the possibility of postwar Soviet-American cooperation had proved illusory, as Russian control was established over eastern Europe and Communist expansion posed threats to Greece and Turkey. Responding to an appeal from the Greek government for economic aid, Truman urged Congress to allocate $400 million in assistance to Greece and Turkey. It was clear from his congressional address, however, that the issue was far greater. In words that were to form the basis of American foreign and defence policy over the next two decades, the president declared, "... it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."

Writing under the pseudonym "Mr X", Kennan compared Soviet policy to "a fluid stream which moves constantly, wherever it is permitted to move, toward a given goal." To counter this relentless expansionist pressure, he argued, "US policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansionist tendencies."

In Egypt, we saw this policy in operation, particularly after the 1952 Revolution, in the offers made to the Egyptian leadership, and the pressure exerted upon it by John Foster Dulles, US secretary of state under President Eisenhower. President Nasser rejected these overtures, refusing to toe the line, as he later refused to enter other alliances intended to serve the same purpose: the Fertile Crescent Alliance, the Baghdad Pact and CENTO.

Egypt's stance was supported by the international climate prevailing at the time, as the bipolar balance of power inhibited the ability of both superpowers to implement their policies. On the other hand, this very dynamic climate, which enabled Egypt to avoid falling in with America's policy of "encirclement and containment," had a profound impact on the affairs of regional entities. The Middle East in particular was divided into countries that were variably drawn into the Soviet or the US sphere of influence. The tug-of-war played out in the region persisted until the beginning of the 1990s, when the disintegration of the eastern bloc, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the victory of the allied forces in the Gulf War brought the US to the fore as the dominant power in the "new world order." It was at this stage that the US initiated its new "dual containment" policy in the Middle East.

The most comprehensive and coherent statement of US policy in the Middle East under the Clinton administration can be found in a speech by Martin Indyk, delivered in May 1993. The basic elements of this policy may be summed up as follows: promoting Arab-Israeli peace in the west and dual containment of Iraq and Iran in the east; curbing the spread of weapons of mass destruction in the region; promoting the vision of a more democratic and prosperous region for all the peoples of the Middle East. Of course, "promoting Arab-Israeli peace" is to be understood as applying the Israel-US concept of peace. Similarly, it is understood that Israel is to be exempted with regard to any cooperative arrangements to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, and that the prosperity of the Zionist state is to be at the heart of any vision of prosperity for the region as a whole.

The US accords the first element of this policy the highest priority. According to Indyk, its importance rests on the concept of interdependence between the eastern and western halves of the region, since containing the threats posed by Iraq and Iran in the east will enhance the ability of the US "to promote peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours in the west"; promoting Arab-Israeli peace in the west, in turn, will enhance the ability of the US "to contain the threats from Iran and Iraq in the east." The success of these mutually supportive policies, in the US's vision, will facilitate the achievement of the second and third objectives of US Middle East policy as outlined by Indyk.

As for the Gulf region, US policy "rejects the old balance-of-power game" with regard to Iraq and Iran, which permitted "the building up of one in order to balance the other." Instead, it is based on "restricting the military ambitions of both Iraq and Iran," relying on "regional allies — Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the GCC and Turkey — to preserve a [favourable] balance of power" in the region. The policy of "counter[ing] both the Iraqi and Iranian regimes" without "depend[ing] on one to counter the other" would also facilitate the achievement of several other traditional US objectives in the region, notably ensuring the security of US allies, and Israel in particular, and safeguarding the flow of Gulf oil.

Since the policy of dual containment relied on the cooperation of countries in the region, however, many of which had limited manoeuvrability in their capacity to support this policy, and in light of several new developments that had not been taken into account, the strategy as it was put into effect by the US failed to meet its objectives. Before proceeding to examine the new trends in US foreign policy toward the Middle East and the shift from a "dual containment" to "total containment", however, it will be useful to quickly note the origins of the Turkish-Israeli defence alliance.

Originally, the US and Israel proposed to Egypt that it enter a new strategic defence alliance in the Middle East. Egypt raised three questions: Who would the members be? What would be the aims of the alliance? And against whom was the alliance to be formed? In answer to the first question, it was suggested that the alliance would possibly consist of a core of three countries: Egypt, Israel and Jordan. It would have several objectives, the most important of which would be to overcome Egypt's objections to Israel's sole possession of nuclear arms in the region since Egypt, as a member of such a pact, would benefit from the defence umbrella the Israeli arsenal would provide. As for the response to the third question, it was indicated that the alliance was to be against Iran.

The response of the Egyptian leadership was a categorical no. Why would Egypt want to enter a new defence alliance in the region, Egyptian decision-makers asked, and, even if Egypt did want to enter such an alliance, why would it want to cooperate with Israel? As for the Israeli nuclear arsenal, the Egyptians expressed their belief that it would always remain a threat to Egypt. This problem can only be solved in two ways: either Israel accepts President Hosni Mubarak's initiative to make the Middle East an area free of weapons of mass destruction, or Israel will have to accept the reality of an arms race aimed at achieving a balance of military power along the lines of the nuclear parity that was obtained between the Soviet Union and the US on the European front, and that exists in Asia, where there are three nuclear powers: China, India and Pakistan. The Egyptians also refuted the notion that Iran was an enemy of Egypt. There might be some problems between Egypt and Iran at present, they said, but the two countries share a common history and there is still a good possibility that they will overcome their present difficulties.

The declaration of a Turkish-Israeli defence alliance on 23 February 1996 was a direct response to Egypt's refusal of the US-Israeli overture. The new alliance, in its regional context, is a manifestation of the increasing desire of both parties to strengthen their presence in the region. Turkey views the pact as a means of asserting itself as a regional power, while for Israel it is another vehicle which will allow it to impose its hegemony on the region. For Israel, too, the pact serves as a means to pressure Syria — militarily surrounded by land, sea and air — to make concessions in negotiations over the Golan Heights.

The prevalent fears among the Turkish political leadership that Turkey was declining in strategic importance to the US, on the other hand, determined Turkey's agreement to enter the security arrangement. This factor explains Turkey's new orientation towards the Middle East where, in addition to concluding the defence alliance with Israel, it has conducted military operations inside Iraqi territory and has taken increasingly antagonistic stances toward Syria and Iraq over the issue of water, and against the Arabs as a whole over the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the opinion of Turkish policy-makers, such positions will enhance Turkey's status among the countries of Western Europe and enhance its chances of admittance as a member of the EU.

The Turkish-Israeli alliance and the subsequent naval manoeuvres are part of the process of redrawing the map of the region according to the changes in the balance of power that the US hopes to effect. The US envisions a Middle East divided into separate, relatively autonomous regions, facilitating Israeli control and hegemony over the area as a whole. This fragmentation will in effect safeguard Israel's position when it emerges from the final phase of Middle East negotiations, which will determine power configurations in the region for many years to come.

Fragmentation, factionalism and the lack of a minimum level of political, economic and strategic consensus in the Arab world have further encouraged the development of this situation. In addition, the Arabs are hampered by the current strategic imbalance and the heavy social and political expenditures needed to redress this imbalance and rebuild Arab strength on new bases. Yet it appears that the US does not want to leave anything to chance. The shift from dual to total containment, therefore, is America's way of isolating the Arab world from any power that could obstruct US and Israeli designs in the Middle East.

The area in which "total containment" is being applied is the new Middle East as defined by Kennan's strategy of "dual containment". The eastern sector comprises the six GCC countries, Iran and Iraq; the western sector comprises six other countries which make up the arena of the Arab-Israeli conflict: Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Turkey and Egypt. These 14 countries together make up the core of America's conception of the new Middle East. The area is contained to the north by the Turkish-Israeli alliance, to the east by the policy of dual containment and the economic and security blockade on Iraq, to the west by the economic and political blockade on Libya, and to the south by the situation in Sudan along with the plans, promoted by the US, to partition the country. The encirclement is strengthened by defence and security arrangements between the US and some Gulf countries, in addition to the actual presence of US forces in the Arabian peninsula, the Gulf of Oman, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

The US, in short, is in the process of surrounding the region with a great wall. We must confront the implementation of this strategy, or we will wake up to find that our region has been sealed off from the world and that Israel has a free hand to accomplish its political, strategic and economic designs, which are definitely not in the interests of the Arabs.

President Mubarak was asked recently to assess the ramifications of the Israeli-Turkish manoeuvres. He answered that Egypt expressed its opinion at the outset, when the manoeuvres were announced. Egypt, he said, objects strongly to this step, which is directed primarily against Syria. Egypt refuses to countenance any alliance against Syria or any other Arab country. The president is also concerned by the announcement that the manoeuvres will be repeated in the future. We must monitor future developments closely, he said; based on our assessment, we will decide what action we should take. I believe the president was implying that our assessment of future developments is intrinsically linked with our vigilance with respect to the implementation of America's new strategy in the Middle East. We must take appropriate actions to avoid the complete isolation of our region.

The writer is a strategic expert at the National Centre for Middle East Studies.

Al-Ahram Weekly

No to war

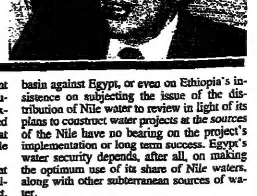
The message US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright received from President Hosni Mubarak on the final stop of her Middle East tour was clear and firm: no to a military strike against Iraq and yes to all-out efforts to settle Baghdad's dispute with the United Nations by peaceful means.

Albright had toured the region to garner support for military action to cripple Iraq militarily. With the exception of Kuwait, and possibly Jordan, all Arab countries she visited were averse to a military strike. Egypt, already deeply concerned for the Iraqi people who have been suffering greatly as a result of international sanctions clamped after Iraq's 1990 invasion of neighbouring Kuwait, is totally opposed to a military strike that would not only decimate Iraqi military power but is bound to inflict great harm on the civilian population. Iraqi military sites are not isolated islands. They rub shoulders with population centres.

Another consideration behind the Egyptian stance is the devastating effect a military strike could have on the entire Middle East. On one hand, it would inflame nationalist Arab sentiment against the United States, the main power broker in the Arab-Israeli peace process. This would fuel violence throughout the area against US and possibly Israeli targets and provide terrorists with a new pretext to expand their operations in their home countries.

Yet another consideration - which has not been subject of official comment but is on everybody's mind — is the double standard implicit in US dealing with this part of the world. Washington looks the other way then it comes to Israel's huge nuclear arsenal, reputedly consisting of some 200 warheads. But it raises hell about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and does not want any other country in the Middle East, notably Libya and Iran, to have such weapons. The fallout from military action against Iraq is virtually certain to engulf the peace process, with unpredictable consequences.

A new community spirit



Ibrahim Nafie continues his discussion of the strategies necessary to escape the confines of the Nile Valley

Across the ages great Egyptian civilisations have borne testimony to the Egyptian people's determination to meet the most demanding challenges head on. Today, we see this mettle in action again in the resolve of the Egyptian people and their political leadership to move out the narrow band of the Nile Valley into the broad expanses of the desert.

The move away from the Nile began with the establishment of new cities, fully equipped in terms of utilities, services and employment opportunities. These cities, now numbering 18, are nestled like pearls in the midst of the desert, adjacent to newly developed agricultural or industrial surroundings.

Following this came the decision to develop hundreds of kilometres of Egypt's shores, rendering extensive stretches of previously uninhabited coastlines available for tourism and residential, commercial and industrial purposes.

Then, in 1994, the massive Sinai development project began to be implemented. This project, due for completion in 2017 and costing $75 billion, aims to increase the population of Sinai to 3.2 million. In addition to providing for the integrated development of industry, tourism, mining, and urbanisation, plans also include bringing vast expanses of the Sinai desert under cultivation with the water of the Salam Canal.

Yet more ambitious and far-reaching is the national project for the development of Upper Egypt, a fundamental component of which is the landmark New Valley project. The extension of the waters of the Nile via a canal into the Western Desert will enable the irrigation of thousands of acres of cultivable land and the establishment of new urban centres.

The concept of creating a new valley parallel to the Nile Valley is the answer to the ominous challenge of overpopulation and attrition of the available resources in the Nile Valley. It is only natural that this massive scheme, representing such a crucial transformation in our lives, should provoke passionate reactions and spark scepticism as to its economic feasibility.

While such debate is healthy, it is important to remain objective and to found one's arguments on sound evidence. In this respect, exhaustive scientific studies have demonstrated that the project is indeed feasible and that there are extensive areas of potentially fertile land.

It is also quite off the mark to suggest that the New Valley project was posed as an alternative to the Sinai development project. Quite to the contrary, in light of considerations of strategic depth inside Egypt's eastern and southern borders, these projects should be seen as coextensive and the fact that they are being implemented simultaneously should be considered a positive factor.

More misleading is the tendency to criticise this sort of project on the basis of short term cost-benefit ratios. Such far-reaching schemes should be viewed, not only in terms of the ultimate tangible returns for cost over the long-term — at which point the costs will appear negligible — but, more importantly, in terms of their overall economic, social, political, strategic, and environmental benefits.

Simultaneously, it is begging the question to encumber the project with hypothetical problems. Speculations based on John Garang's claims that he will erect a series of dams in southern Sudan if he succeeds in gaining control over that area, or on Israel's repeated machinations to incite the countries of the Nile basin against Egypt, or even on Ethiopia's insistence on subjecting the issue of the distribution of Nile water to review in light of its plans to construct water projects at the sources of the Nile have no bearing on the project's implementation or long term success. Egypt's water security depends, after all, on making the optimum use of its share of Nile waters, along with other subterranean sources of water.

Why, we must ask, should we hem ourselves in with rigid thought patterns. History is replete with examples of great visions brought to life through perseverance combined with imaginative thinking and thorough study. The Colorado River project in the USA and the Indira Ghandi Canal in western India are but two specific examples of successful large-scale irrigation projects that offer inspiration and guidance.

It is, of course, essential to equip potential settlers with the skills, tools and knowledge to enable them to acclimatise to life and work in a new and unfamiliar environment. One can conceive of perhaps ten re-acclimatisation centres equipped for this purpose situated at strategic junctures along the Toshki project canal. Simultaneously, it will be possible to stimulate motivation by broadening the base of public participation. One expects diverse types of urban communities to emerge in the area covered by the project. Some communities may be geared toward a particular activity, such as farming, tourism or technology, while others may integrate a mixture of commercial, industrial and agrarian activities. Such diversity demands that each of these different communities enjoys a good measure of administrative autonomy and one can envision, for example, a system of popularly elected community councils which will handle local community affairs.

In addition, a new mentality must be brought to bear in all fields of activity. In agriculture, for example, large tracts of land would be open to large-scale investment and mechanised farming, while smaller tracts of land can be distributed in the form of cooperatives to be managed by their owners. Hi-tech valleys would engage the most qualified experts in the manufacture and assembly of electronic components, while research and data centres would work together with university and academic institutions to continually up-date and streamline production. Small and mid-scale enterprises should also have their place alongside the many larger projects to be established in the valley. The low starting costs of such enterprises, their competitive advantage in local and foreign markets, lower demand for machinery and greater capacity to rely on local raw materials render small-enterprises as major component of the New Valley project. In this respect, we do well to remember that small enterprises contribute 31 per cent of Italy's total industrial production and their exports were largely responsible for the 1996 recovery of the Italian economy.

In Egypt we have already seen a tangible manifestation of this spirit of flexibility, dynamism and innovation in the houses designed by the internationally reputed Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy. His houses and other community structures, constructed out of locally available raw materials and featuring numerous domes and vaulted chambers to provide natural cooling and ventilation, could well serve as a model for the homes and buildings of the new communities of the Western Valley.

Can Europe save the peace?

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed believes the crisis now undermining the Clinton administration is placing Europe before the need to play a more assertive role in the Middle East

There is no doubt that Clinton's sex scandals and the charges of perjury and subornation of witnesses that he risks facing are bound to adversely affect his ability to carry out his sponsorship of the Middle East peace process effectively. This raises the question of whether any other international actor, specifically, Europe, could fill the vacuum, in the context of a world order in which the United States is assumed to be the leading power.

It should be remembered that just before his meetings with Netanyahu and Arafat in Washington last month, and before the disclosure of the Monica Lewinsky affair, Clinton received messages from British Prime Minister Tony Blair, French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. The European leaders urged him to spare no effort in bridging the gap between the protagonists, on the grounds that moving forward with the peace process was not an issue of interest to the US alone, but also to its European allies. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the Europeans allowing such a dangerous vacuum to remain unfilled in the event that Washington fails to achieve the common objective. Moreover, Europe is worried by the US premise that the Iraqi crisis will only be resolved through the military option. Europe believes that working out a peaceful resolution to the Iraqi crisis is no less important than achieving progress in the Arab-Israeli peace process.

It can be argued that Europe is unable to act in concert because the European Union is still in the making and no one representative can speak in its name. Indeed, achieving consensus on any specific topic remains an arduous process for the Europeans. But one must not forget that the United States, despite its centralised federal government, also has great difficulty in reaching consensus on many issues of public concern, because the American system is based on a game of contending lobbies jockeying for power which, by definition, presupposes divergent opinions.

Should Europe have a role to play in finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, it should not be regarded as complementary to that of the US, but as having a specific character of its own. After all, it was in Europe that the Jews were exposed to forms of persecution which engendered the ideology of Zionism and, eventually, the state of Israel as its material embodiment. As effects cannot be solved without addressing their causes, the conflict in the Middle East is organically linked to Europe. It is actually a trilateral, not a bilateral, game, in which Europe is a component element.

Of course, Europeans could argue that they have already atoned for their sins. The Germans, in particular, can claim that they have compensated Israel financially for the crimes committed by the Nazis against the Jews. But it seems that what the Europeans have done so far has not laid Jewish fears to rest. And, as long as they continue to believe, rightly or wrongly, that the Holocaust could occur again, the Palestinians will go on being persecuted and deprived of their legitimate rights. This will continue to be the case as long as Israel is not a normal state, as long as it perceives itself as a haven for all Jews who still believe that they risk persecution anywhere else in the world.

So far, the Europeans have re-opened old files selectively, on the grounds that to do otherwise would be damaging for all concerned. Their reticence is understandable but, I believe, wrong. I proceed from the premise that our world is still bipolar, if not in the previous form of blatant East-West bipolarity, in a more insidious form between North and South. The new bipolarity is blurred by an emerging globalism. But a North-South divide cannot go hand in hand with globalism: the latter presupposes the removal of all material barriers between states and societies; the former presupposes the protection of the privileged North from mass migrations from the dispossessed South. In the absence of material barriers, spiritual barriers emerge instead. Racism is the most appropriate ideology by which to justify immunising the North against threats coming from the South. A revival of racism is thus an in-built feature of the new world order. And, as the most striking expression of this mechanism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, if unresolved, will remain a catalyst for the revival of racism worldwide indefinitely.

The manifestations of this mechanism are more critical in Europe than in the United States, which is not averse to immigration as such. After all, America initially came into being as a nation of immigrants and has always assumed that it was a melting pot for all its citizens, whatever their origins. The case of Europe is different. Its ruling establishments remember the days when they were colonial powers over the hordes now flocking to Europe's shores; they are not prepared to allow the peoples of their former colonies to undermine their integrity from within.

An example of the mutual distrust across the trans-Mediterranean divide is how the Garaudy affair has snowballed. The noted French philosopher was charged and tried under the Gayssot Law, which prohibits questioning 'facts' concerning the Holocaust. In the eyes of many Europeans, questioning the scope and nature of the Nazi extermination of Jews is perceived as a brand of anti-Semitism, not of anti-Zionism. In the eyes of Arabs and Muslims, Garaudy is hailed not only because of his conversion to Islam, but also for courageously standing up to Zionism at a time the peace process has reached a dead end thanks to Netanyahu's uncompromising line. The Garaudy affair indicates that the Arab-Israeli conflict is undergoing an ideological mutation, from being a confrontation between pan-Arabism and Zionism, into becoming a confrontation between Islam and Judaism.

Under the bipolar world order, sharp polarisation at the summit of the world community of nations repressed expressions of conflict that emanated from below. With the collapse of that order, disputes arising from local reasons of conflict have proliferated. In the Middle East, one of the regions where the mechanism of the bipolar world order was replaced by that of a very clear-cut unipolar order under US hegemony, the process of unleashing local conflicts remained restrained. However, with the current vulnerability of the Clinton administration, the US is no longer in a position to impose its unchallenged will on the region. This is an invitation to Europe to step in more assertively. An immediate test will be how the stand-off with Iraq will evolve: will the US line prevail, or will Europe, in collaboration with Russia, manage to prevent a US strike against Iraq?

Holding office

By Naguib Mahfouz

I remember clearly how I came to work at *Al-Ahram*. One evening in 1957, Mohamed Hassanein Heikal sent me word that my next novel should be published by *Al-Ahram*. I had stopped writing, but this was such a generous offer that I accepted. *The Children of Gebelawi* was written about three years later.

When I left the Cinema Institute, and Tharwat Okasha, appointed me as his adviser, Mr Heikal himself called me and said: "Your office at Al-Ahram is ready. I was afraid that Mr Okasha would take offence, so I stayed at the Ministry of Culture until my retirement. That very day, I went to Al-Ahram. The office Mr Heikal had promised me was occupied, of course, so I sat in the office next door to Tawfik El-Hakim's. It was on the famous sixth floor, where Heikal had gathered the country's greatest writers and thinkers. Mr Heikal took special care of writers, and held them in very high esteem. When the great man wanted to tell us something, he would come to us himself. He never summoned us to his office, although ministers and high officials were happy to go to him when he asked. We saw only kindness and humanity from him.

After Tawfik El-Hakim's death, many people said I should have his office. I did move into the office, but his desk stayed empty. I could never imagine anyone else sitting there, so I would sit on the sofa I always sat on when I went to visit him.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

A war for Monica's sake?

Al-Wafd: "If governments choose to remain silent, this should not be the case with the people of these countries. The voices of parties, unions, societies and political forces in the Arab countries should be heard loud and clear as they denounce the aggression the US is preparing (against Iraq) on Israel's behalf. Only Israel would benefit by such an aggression as it would ensure its continuing military superiority and would destroy any hope of an Arab 'Eastern Front' even after Saddam is gone. Under the aegis of the UN, which has become a tool in the hands of the US secretary of state, Iraq is being denuded of any vestige of military power. The differences of opinion between the permanent members of the Security Council have not stopped the US from planning a strike against Iraq in accordance with the wishes of Zionist groups which seek hegemony over the Arab world."
(Gamal Badawi, 31 January)

Al-Arabi: "The question is not one of Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction. The inspection teams have been looking everywhere for seven years and have found nothing. The issue is that Iraq is an oil-rich country, possibly the second richest in the world. It is also strategically placed and has great industrial and agricultural potential which could be of use to the Arab world. It is also opposed to Zionism and imperialist plots. Wherein lies our duty? We should appeal to the emir of Kuwait to declare openly that he is against a US strike against Iraq and demand that Turkey should not allow its bases to be used for such an attack. We should also appeal to all Arab and Islamic countries to act in order to prevent such a strike. And, finally, back home, we should come out in our millions to besiege the US Embassy, the FBI office and the Zionist embassy in Cairo in order to paralyse their activities."
(Hassan Fahmi Mustafa, 2 February)

Al-Akhbar: "Both the French and Russian foreign ministry spokesmen have affirmed that the content of (chief UN arms inspector Richard) Butler's statements does not correspond to the information presented by the special international committee to the Security Council. This can only mean one of two things: Either Butler is concealing information from the Security Council or he is deliberately presenting incorrect and distorted information to the media. In both cases he is exceeding his authority. It is worth noting that Butler's statements come at a time when preparations are under way for a strike against Iraq. His unbalanced and irresponsible stance can influence the prevailing atmosphere in favour of such a strike."
(Nabil Zaki, 1 February)

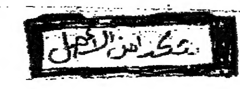
Al-Alam Al-Yom: "Poor old Saddam! And poor, poor Iraqi people! The latter is more accurate because it will be the children of Iraq who will pay for Clinton's amorous trysts. In order to keep the eyes of the Americans off his underpants, Clinton is prepared to wage war against Saddam! As for Arafat, he will have to wait outside the courtroom until Clinton's fate is decided. As for Netanyahu, he is living the best days of his life. He will continue to build settlements without being pestered by officials from Washington. And as for the Arabs, they will continue to make all sorts of statements while extremists explode their bombs on all fronts."
(Mohamed Hassan Al-Alfi, 29 January)

Al-Ahali: "Once again the negotiations between Arafat, Netanyahu and Clinton in Washington have been an exercise in futility. There is absolutely nothing to indicate that the peace process is alive. It is something that is being kept going by the US but which the Arabs should reconsider if they are serious. Most probably, the Arabs will continue to talk of 1998 as being the decisive year but nothing is likely to happen. And we should not forget a statement by a Palestinian official who said that the US role was worthless and that the reality of that will become apparent in the coming weeks."
(Abdel-Aal El-Baqouri, 28 January)

Compiled by **Galal Nassar**



As the Cairo International Book Fair approaches, Egyptian intellectuals reach a fever pitch of excitement and anticipation. This is especially obvious in Samir Sarhan's eyes, which seem ready to pop out of their orbits. The rest of his face is melancholy, with heavy jowls; is the head of the General Egyptian Book Organisation fretting because he has not yet finished reading last year's books?



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Washington's woeful wiles

Having resorted to deception, pressure and bluffing, the US is moving full speed ahead toward a unilateral declaration of war on Iraq. Washington claims that it is empowered by the international community and the Gulf states to take military action against Iraq, and that no further resolution of the Security Council in this respect is needed.

The majority of Arab countries, especially Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, as well as most European Union members, and Russia and China, have expressed their qualified or outright opposition to a military operation against Iraq in retaliation for Saddam Hussein's refusal to grant UNSCOM inspectors access to certain locations said to hold weapons of mass destruction. Yet US Secretary of State Albright, backed by the British Prime Minister (and by Israel, of course), is attempting to mobilise worldwide support for a US attack on Iraq under the pretext that the US is protecting the Middle East against an imminent Iraqi attack. Washington alleges that Iraq will use chemical and biological weapons as yet undiscovered by UNSCOM inspectors, who have been going over sovereign Iraqi territory with a fine-toothed comb for seven long years.

The US Defence Secretary, however, is certain of one matter. The intensive air strikes which will almost certainly be launched within the coming three weeks are not expected to bring down the Iraqi regime, topple Saddam Hussein, guarantee the permanent elimination of chemical and biological weapons (which the US claims is its aim) or convince Saddam to allow UNSCOM free access to all sites. In fact, William Cohen believes that the military attack could lead to quite contrary results.

Further, if the sudden military escalation by Washington is intended to cover up Clinton's scandals and divert public attention from his personal problems, these operations may fail to achieve even that. The victims of Clinton's scandals and his political opponents alike are clearly achieving a measure of success in undermining the president.

For seven years, the US has threatened and undertaken military action against Iraq. "No-fly zones" were designated by the US and Britain in Iraq, UNSCOM inspection teams took turns destroying all weapons they found, an economic boycott was imposed and constraints placed on the pumping of Iraqi oil; yet the end result was a series of fiascoes as far as US policy in Iraq is concerned. Today, with the coalition dismembered, only Israel and Britain remain willing — or rather eager — to lend their support to a US attack on Iraq. Evidently, Kuwait is forced by its circumstances to back the US in realising its objective of destroying Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

It is clear that the notorious injustice and arbitrary nature of US policy in Iraq, the ambiguity of its true objectives, the US's reluctance to close the Iraqi file and gradually lift the sanctions, which have compounded the suffering of the Iraqi people through shortages of food and medicine, are further complicating, not solving, the problem. US policy strangely resembles a vendetta, a fact which has heightened tensions in the region still further. While the Arab countries loathe Saddam's methods in dealing with his people and his neighbours, the US has provided the Iraqi president with sufficient justification to remain in power, and to win the sympathy and support his own people as well as other Arab peoples who oppose US military action against Iraq.

The danger of US policy resides in the difficulty of putting an end to military operations once they prove ineffective in subjugating Saddam. In fact, there is a chance that air operations will get out of hand, spreading into an all-out war on the ground. If this happens, US troops will suffer losses, and the repercussions of the war will be felt far and wide in the Middle East. Then, the US will have failed to achieve any of its objectives.



Power vacuum, war machine

The destruction of Iraq will finish Clinton off. Who will benefit? **Edward Said** writes

It does not take Aristotle's genius to acknowledge that the United States is in an ugly and unstable mood these days, given the various allegations of sexual impropriety against the president, the continuing impasse with Iraq, the failure of Yasser Arafat's visit and Netanyahu's much-advertised and vocal alliance with the right-wing Christian movement led by Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, both of whom are fanatical supporters of Israeli expansion. When she appeared on national television a few days ago, Hillary Clinton was right, I think, to blame a right-wing "conspiracy" for the huge media storm and the Paula Jones and Monica Lewinsky cases; as the century draws to a close, it seems to me that the battle between what is called left and right in the US gets bloodier and more unyielding, with results for other parts of the world that are distinctly unpleasant.

"Conspiracy" is a word I find difficult to utter when politics are concerned, particularly when it is used for so large a number of factors, but in the sense that "conspiracy" means a series of linked actions and intentions, it is the correct one here.

What is at stake within the United States is whether a distinct liberalising trend, present domestically since the Franklin Roosevelt presidency (ending in 1945), can continue or not. This trend instituted the by now crumbling, or at least seriously threatened, social security system, the progressive income tax, free education, laws to protect workers and unions, and the system of welfare relief that, on the one hand, guaranteed minimum wages and employment and, on the other, took care of seriously disadvantaged or incapacitated sectors of the population. During the Lyndon Johnson period, the trend was intensified with the Civil Rights Bill, the flowering of the women's movement, and the increase in social services, housing, affirmative action, etc. designated as an integral part of the Great Society, as Johnson called it.

With the advent of Ronald Reagan in 1980 — Nixon and Ford made little difference in this arena — there began a slow erosion of the principle of social and economic equality and an attack on the idea of "big government", which was a euphemism for the control of capitalism. One of the many flaws of the Jimmy Carter presidency was his emphasis on reducing government spending, hence reducing social and economic control of the capitalist market. Reagan instituted a full-scale assault on the notion that the state has a responsibility towards its citizens. He broke the trade unions, he reduced taxes to the advantage of corporations and the wealthy, he made a determined attack on the idea of welfare, social security and affirmative action (by which minorities were given preferential treatment in jobs, admissions to universities, and so on) and, perhaps most important, he openly allied himself with the Christian conservatives who dominate the south and west (the Sun Belt, as it is called). In foreign policy, Reagan stood for an escalation of the Cold War, vast increases in defence spending, and an unremitting attack on internationalism, cooperation with the United Nations, regional neighbourliness. Bush continued this direction, whose apex in foreign policy was reached during the Gulf War of 1991, when American power was successfully projected across the whole world. Now the United States acts as the winner of the Cold War and, as Madeleine Albright never tires of informing us, the world's leader, whatever that may happen to mean.

As I have said before, religion in the United States plays a much greater role than most foreigners are aware, making what has been called Islamic fundamentalism seem like a relatively mild affair. At least 200 million Americans are affiliated to one or another religious sect, the most numerous being ultra-conservative, anti-foreign, anti-abortion, anti-women, anti-labour, anti-welfare and anti-tax in their vague general beliefs. Their allies in the business and policy worlds are referred to as neo-conservatives, and include a fair number of former liberals who have turned from one god to another. American politics are deeply contradictory, of course, but anti-intellectualism — which was described forty years ago in a memorable book by the great historian Richard Hofstader — is the common strain. This includes a deep suspicion of anything that isn't simple, fundamental, traditional, down-to-earth and "American" in the ideological sense, and can be exploited easily by demagogues and cynical politicians of the right. The key word is "freedom", which includes the freedom to own and use firearms, the freedom to trade and use the marketplace without restraint, even if it means serious injury to health and decency, the freedom, above all, to make America's will rule all over the earth.

Bill Clinton, clever politician that he is, has made use of these aspects of American political life, which always includes a good deal of hypocrisy and outright lying. The US, for example, openly proclaims the virtues of "free" trade and pushes the idea on poorer and weaker countries all over the world: abolish trade quotas, they are told, allow free enterprise to flourish, remove price support mechanisms for the poor. Yet in reality the US is viciously protectionist at home, and has been fighting trade wars with Japan and China precisely on those grounds, exactly the opposite of what it says should obtain for the world. The US says it opposes weapons proliferation, but sells more arms than any other country, has signed only the chemical weapons pact (and refuses to sign nuclear, biological and landmine non-proliferation treaties), and pretends to support the United Nations but has neither paid its share of dues nor abided by resolutions and conventions it has promised to uphold. The rationale behind all this is religion, that is, the unquestioned assumption of American exceptionalism, that this is a country uniquely blessed with a mission by God, and the rest of the world be damned. In a recent poll, 86 per cent of the American population claimed that God loved them.

And yet, despite his scheduled, staged appearances in church carrying a bible, Clinton appears to many people on the right to be an irreligious scoundrel whose occasional attempts to uphold affirmative action, guarantee a minimum wage, remain pro-choice (i.e. pro-abortion) and generally refuse to cut taxes are cited as indications that he belongs to the far left. The charge is particularly ugly when levelled at his wife, whose remarkable intelligence, political ruthlessness and tough personality generate either great admiration or condemnation. There is no doubt, however, that the investigations of the Clintons' slightly shady past financial dealings — surely no worse than those of Republican politicians like Senator D'Amato of New York or Jesse Helms of North Carolina — are part of a bigger plan to rid the country of anything liberal that remains from the Roosevelt and Johnson eras. And because the American media in the first and last place respond to commercial pressures, practically anything can now be said about Clinton: accusations of murder, drug-running, larceny, and of course fornication. The burning light of religious zeal that one can see in the eyes of powerful men like Falwell and Robertson is terrifying: one knows that these men and their easily manipulated followers can be driven to acts of the rashest indiscretion and even violence.

Netanyahu's conscious entry into this local battle was an extremely provocative and cynically daring move, and also a threat against Clinton's domestic power. Because he has been so terribly weakened by the Paula Jones and Monica Lewinsky scandals — neither of them with any real basis in legality, but pursued by the passionately right-wing, anti-Clinton "independent" counsel Kenneth Starr — Clinton will do nothing at all in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, except appear to be involved. Yasser Arafat's hope that he could get something from his Washington trip was ill-considered and based on a pathetically insufficient knowledge of US politics. Temperamentally and ideologically pro-Israel anyway, Clinton is not about to risk a full-scale battle with both the Christian and Jewish right-wing over a mere matter of Palestinian rights or even of simple human justice. But the real danger is that he will be advised by his counsellors, pollsters, and confidants to go to war against Iraq. A recent issue of *The New York Times* carried two editorial articles, one by former editor A M Rosenthal, a rabid Likud Zionist, and the other by two prominent young figures of the Republican right wing, William Kristol and Robert Kagan. Both articles urge Clinton not just to bomb Iraq, but to remove Saddam, in effect to destroy Iraq totally by using the four heavy armoured divisions and two airborne divisions now in place in the Gulf to occupy the country after first having bombed it unmercifully.

There is no doubt that there now exists a massive convergence of ultra-conservative interests in the country to oppose what Clinton stands for, and recklessly to push him into the kind of war from which he will not easily be extricated. I do not doubt that Clinton himself may be thinking of a war as a way of diverting attention away from his domestic problems. But this crisis with Iraq has now lasted for four months without military action, and I think we must conclude that reluctance on the part of the United Nations, the Arab states, and the Europeans, plus the problem of what to do after an airstrike, have deterred Clinton from unilateral action. There is also the problem — real or imagined — of what Saddam Hussein might do if indeed he possesses the weapons that Richard Butler claims he has been hiding. The risk of widening complications and uncontainable damage, both human and environmental, have so far held back Clinton's decisions, but I do think that there is mounting malicious and mischievous pressure on him from right-wing Christians and their right-wing Zionist allies to push him into a disastrous war, not only with the aim of finishing off Iraq but also finishing him off. It is noteworthy how, in the chorus of wardrums, the most prominent are those of people very close to Israel, for whom Israel's interests may be more important than those of the US. I therefore conclude that for the time being, so long as Clinton holds out, there will be no war, but that there is inexorable pressure on him personally to make war the only option.

The most unfortunate thing is that there is no unified Arab position to stand against the US; nor is there a mobilised constituency against a new Gulf War within the United States. The vacuum of power thus plays into the hands of people who are willing to risk enormous losses in order to safeguard the holy righteousness of their cause, and it is this constituency that Israel has decided so recklessly to exploit. For surely, lurking beneath the chorus of attacks on Iraq, there is the implicit message that the destruction of that country, and of Clinton, might be very good for Netanyahu's Israel.

Soapbox

Chain reaction

Egypt officially inaugurated its second research reactor on 4 February. EG RR-2 is a 22-megawatt open pool multipurpose reactor designed and manufactured by INVAP, an Argentinean company, under the auspices of the National Committee of Nuclear Energy. As such, the reactor is a product of successful cooperation between Egypt and Argentina, both signatories of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The inauguration highlighted the importance of South-South cooperation in peaceful applications of nuclear energy and advanced technology.

The new reactor, which attained criticality at 5.11am on 27 November 1997, is 11 times more powerful than the existing two-megawatt reactor, which attained criticality in 1961.

Egypt's new reactor may well inaugurate a new dynamism in stagnating nuclear technology. It can promote the peaceful application of nuclear energy in medicine, agriculture, environmental protection and industry. Scientists in universities and other research centres will visit its facilities. The technology transfer and localisation undertaken during the design, construction and fuel fabrication stages has led to the formation of a new generation of scientists and engineers capable of undertaking advanced nuclear projects. Unless success is sustained in other projects, however, stagnation will recur.

Demonstration projects in nuclear desalination should be undertaken immediately, with an emphasis on small and medium reactor systems. Consideration should also be given to dual use reactors for desalination and electricity generation. Supplying potable water and electricity economically to remote areas will alleviate water shortages and foster economic development.



This week's Soapbox speaker is the former president of the Egyptian Atomic Energy Authority.

Fawzi Hammad

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

Sex and Saddam

After all the hue and cry, it took an assertive "I did not have sexual relations with that woman" from Bill Clinton, an impassioned TV showing by Hillary Clinton and a "tough" State of the Union address, in which the tails of war were appropriately wagged at Saddam Hussein, for the philandering American president's "approval ratings" to "hit a new high" of 69 per cent, according to a CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll conducted after the speech.

Clinton is well in the saddle. According to sources in Cairo, a military strike against Iraq has already been decided and, unless Saddam Hussein buckles totally — thus making it very difficult to justify the strike — we are currently witnessing the predetermined dead-end diplomatic moves that provide the smoke screen while the machinery of war is being oiled.

Americans, no less than Israelis, are experts at this kind of manoeuvering — both states were built upon it, as the stories of the "indigenous peoples" of both countries clearly reveal. The tactic is to block every avenue for compromise, making it next to impossible for the most docile of your chosen enemies to submit; continually changing agendas, pulling new issues, like rabbits, out of a variety of hats, so that by the time the "enemy" has succumbed in one major area, that area has been marginalised, and another "major" issue tops the agenda.

As Noam Chomsky has shown over and over again, a compliant media and a general public who believe that their country has a God-given right to rule over others as it pleases are two essential conditions for that country's political leadership to get away with this kind of policy. These, at any rate, are not things that either Clinton or Netanyahu need worry about so long as the enemy is incapable of hitting back in any effective way.

In the recently released film *Wag the Dog*, a US president commissions a Hollywood producer to stage a fictional war against Albania to distract the American public from his own sexual scandal. Ironic references to life imitating art notwithstanding, I do not believe that the impending Iraq strike is motivated, at least in any substantial way, by Clinton's need to distract attention from Ms Lewinsky. The abovementioned poll results show that Clinton, at least for the moment, is not that hard pressed.

Distraction on a grand scale is, however, very much at issue, ironically, both in the Lewinsky and Iraqi affairs. What I find most interesting about this latest Clinton sex scandal is not whether or not it involved a conspiracy by the Christian and, in most Arab interpretations, Jewish right wing. Ms Lewinsky may well have been a right-wing mole, especially planted to entrap the president by capitalising on his well-known "weaknesses". The fact remains, precisely, that these weaknesses were widely known. Spectacle, rather than substance of any worth, was what I saw in the sordid revelations about a sordid and, especially, heartless and dehumanised kind of sexuality.

In one of the best commentaries I've read on the Clinton sex crisis, the *Guardian*'s Peter Preston, under the title "Watergate replayed as Whitehall farce" wondered what the fuss was all about. Writing at the time when banner headlines all over the world were talking of Clinton's virtually impending impeachment, Preston injected a sober, if ominous, note. "What precisely is shocking here?... Everybody knows about the President of the United States. He told them; Joe Klein [author of the mid-'90s blockbuster novel, *Primary Colours*, fictionalising Clinton's sexual dalliances, recently made into a feature film] told them; a forest of supermarket tabloids and random ladies told them. So no surprise at all," wrote Preston.

Knowing about their president, the American public, guided by their media, nevertheless, reveled in the new sordid details. Logically, there could be nothing authentic in the feigned sense of shock, as Preston so aptly pointed out. Even the whole issue of lying under oath, which seemed about to cost Clinton his job, is clearly sheer hypocrisy, since the same people who gave Clinton his record "approval" rating are convinced he's been lying about the nature of his "relations" with Lewinsky. So it was all a put-on, all an act, in which the rulers, the ruled and the media joined, and which the post-State of the Union swing in the poll seems to doubly underline.

The real significance of the Lewinsky affair is that, in essence, it is not much different from the OJ Simpson trial, or even the Oprah Winfrey show. With the president of the republic, of course, it takes on a more overtly political aspect, which is only implicit in the other two, but all of them seem to perform an identical function, which — at a minimum — is to keep the populace entertained and diverted (much as in a Roman arena). More significantly, all these shows give a false sense of citizenship — a virtual-politics sphere in which public concern, involvement in "issues", partisanship and public debate can be engaged in with impunity, without the slightest real effect on the real decisions determining people's real lives. These are made elsewhere.

If this function could be described as a conspiracy, it is doubly pernicious in that no specific group of people can be identified as its instigators; that the great bulk of the conspirators have no idea of their involvement; that the objects of the conspiracy — an essentially disenfranchised citizenship — are such willing victims.

To wag the dog in a fictional war against Albania or a real one against Iraq is thus motivated by imperatives which are much more profound than the diversionary needs of a mere president. Doubtless, Clinton's war rhetoric against Iraq contributed to the upswing in his popularity; an actual war, particularly an electronically "sanitised" one in which only Iraqis are killed and maimed, will further strengthen his presidency. But presidents come and presidents go, as George Bush's post-Gulf War fate testifies. It is ultimately the system that cries out for enemies such as Saddam, for showdowns and ultimatums and, every so often, the odd swift war, and it needs this for domestic no less than imperial hegemony. From a systemic perspective, Lewinsky and Saddam fulfil very much the same function.

"What nation, crediting only a fraction of the current allegations, would elect Bill Clinton as its president?" asks Peter Preston in his article. His answer: "Only a nation which, in the berserkness of its workings, had made Bill Clinton the best candidate on offer. Only a nation as sick as it affects to think he is. You pay, in every sense, for what you get."

America, which witnessed the birth of modern liberal democracy (albeit in a slave-owning society), has for many years now been leading the Western world in overseeing its disintegration. American finesse and expertise in the art of spectacle is fundamentally a function of the impoverishment of its political life. And Europe is learning fast.

A growingly oligarchic post-modern capitalism seems to depend increasingly on spectacle for its survival — the heads and reputations of presidents and royals are a small price to pay, and so, of course, are the lives and livelihoods of unimportant, nameless and faceless men, women and children anywhere from Iraq to Grenada.

A suggested title for a manual on how to govern a Western capitalist country in the late 1990s: "Spectacle: Sex and Saddam".

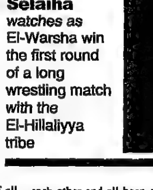
Al-Ahram Weekly

5 - 11 February 1998



Taming Abu Zeid

Nehad Selaiha watches as El-Warsha win the first round of a long wrestling match with the El-Hillaliyya tribe



When Hassan El-Geretli announced in 1944, in the wake of the great success of El-Warsha's stunning and haunting *Tides of Night*, that his next project was to plough through *El-Sira El-Hillaliyya* (the popular epic of the tribe of Beni-Hilal) in the hope of making a play out of it, many thought, with good reason, that he had gone off his rocker and turned suicidal. *El-Sira El-Hillaliyya* may be the *Iliad* of the Arabs, as Abdel-Rahman El-Abnoudi, the poet who collected and published one version of it, likes to call it, and is possibly the most popular and widely sung of all the folk epics that have come down to us, including the famous Sira of Antara Ibn Shaddad, but it is certainly the stuff that nightmares are made of when it comes to dramatisation. Not only is it inordinately massive and voluminous (it falls in 5 books with a total of one million lines), its tangled web of events, characters and stories spans places as far-flung as the desert plateau of Nejd, in the Arabian Peninsula (the home of the tribe) in the East, through Egypt, to Tunisia in the West, and follows the fortunes of the tribe over three generations. No wonder dramatists have shied away from it, in contrast to the other great popular epic *Antara*.

Named after its protagonist (the black desert hero and invincible warrior who, born to the chief of his tribe by an Ethiopian slave, spent his life fighting to throw off the stigma of slavery to get his father to acknowledge him as a legitimate son so that he could marry his beautiful cousin Abla), Antara has received at least six dramatisations — starting with Ahmed Shawqi's classical verse drama, *Antara*, in the twenties, and ending with Yusri El-Gindi's Brechtian re-interpretation of the epic and debunking of the traditional heroic ethic in his political parable *Antara*, presented at El-Tali'a in 1977 in a memorable production by Samir El-Asfouri.

The epic of Beni-Helal, though its hero, Abu Zeid, like Antara, is equally swarthy, rejected by his father at birth, and has initially to fight for recognition with his sword, boasts only one dramatic treatment, *El-Hillaliyya*, again by Yusri El-Gindi, first presented as *Abu Zeid El-Hilali* at El-Tali'a, in a production by El-Asfouri in 1978, then, seven years later, as *Sirat Beni-Hilal*, at Wikalat El-Ghouri with Abdel-Rahman El-Shafi this time in the director's seat.

If Hassan El-Geretli had been your run-of-the-mill director, or the kind of artist who starts off with a definite idea as to what he wants to say, I would not have worried, and it would not have taken him so long to produce a play out of this epic. In the case of Yusri El-Gindi, the unwieldy, digressive and complicated nature of the narrative posed no problem, he came to it, as he had done in the case of the *Antara* epic, with a clear-cut idea about the message he wanted it to put across: that heroic, visionary leaders and so-called saviours can do untold damage to their own people as well as bring ruin upon others. He also had a ready-made form and knew exactly the shape it should take on stage. Armed with Brecht's *verfremdung*, or 'alienation-effect' theory, and the techniques the German poet and director developed to put it into effect and turn the spectators into emotionally detached observers, El-Gindi openly pursued a didactic course. Rather than plunge into the narrative's boggy marshes and treacherous quicksand in the hope of discovering its matrix and sources of energy, he put it at arm's length, firmly consigning it to the past. The play starts long after the heroes of Beni-Hilal have liquidated each other and all been dispatched to either heaven or hell (both locations are to be clearly marked on the stage in bold letters according to the stage directions). A chorus of commentators from the present, armed with various masks and a good supply of sarcastic jokes and mocking squibs, adds another barrier, further fencing off the dead protagonists, and almost reducing them to dead matter that can be newly shaped to serve the author's purposes. The job of this chorus, apart from caricaturing several of the epic's characters, and maddeningly disrupting whatever emotion or coherent action that seems to form, is to conjure up the dead heroes in order to enact the bits of the epic that best illustrate El-Gindi's point. It was a clear case of projecting a particular reading of the present onto a fictional past, and of manipulating the epic in a partisan, reductive manner to offer a critique of both the Arab past and present. And in the fiercely didactic drive of the play, the epic got run over, and its characters were squashed into flat, bloodless ideas and ideological counters.

A poet of the theatre, and never an ideologue, El-Geretli approached *El-Sira El-Hillaliyya* (trembling, one would imagine) with no definite plans or preconceived ideas. Awed and fascinated by the scope and magnitude of the epic, he humbly opted for the rigorously exacting and perilously insecure (but ultimately more rewarding) course of total, unconditional self-surrender and unselfish immersion to the point of almost complete self-negation. Like a wise explorer leading a brave crew on a dangerous expedition into a strange continent of 'infinite deserts', in search of a hidden treasure somewhere, which may or may not exist, and cognizant of all the perils, he spent years carefully preparing for the adventure, training his crew in all the necessary skills for survival, ferreting out whatever relevant material exists, finding the right guides among the old bards and, above all, listening to them and training himself to be guided by them — for it is "the bard alone", as one of El-Warsha's flyers say, "that can tread unerring" and find his way through the shifting sands and infinite deserts of the epic's stories.

The survival skills the travellers had to learn included such traditional performance arts as story-telling, stick-fighting, dervish dancing, *ghawazi* dance, *mawwal* singing and religious chanting, and playing old, traditional wind, string and percussion instruments like the *mizmar*, the *arghoul*, the *rababa* and the *darabukka*. The research side, which started in 1994, consisted in collecting the oral tradition of *El-Sira El-Hillaliyya* from its last great bards; and the immersion stage, which involved the whole group, entailed learning by heart vast stretches of the epic, training to recite and sing them, absorbing the old rhythms, colloquial poetic diction, melodic intonation and voice inflection, and testing their competence in public, over and over, in the open-rehearsal sessions called *Layaly El-Warsha* (El-Warsha Nights).

Out of this continuous, close, daily contact with the narrative (a kind of contact which El-Geretli insisted should not be rigidly guided, planned or conceptualised, but remain always free and spontaneous, subject only to the performer's intimate, personal interaction, and intense, existential engagement with the epic), something began to grow — hesitantly, shyly, almost imperceptibly; something half-glimpsed, half-formed, half-understood and enveloped in a haze of exciting possibilities. The graceful, white tent, designed by Tarek Abul-Futuh (El-Warsha's scenographer and set and costume designer), and pitched in the garden of the British Council in Agouza, among the trees, looked like some mythical, monolithic white pigeon, perching momentarily there for rest, and soon to continue its flight across the vast continuum of time and the great divides between peoples, places and cultures. It was solidly real — the poles and ropes holding it up and all the lighting equipment were clearly visible; all the same, it had about it an air of unreality, the painful feel of fragility and transience. One could imagine it suddenly flapping its wings, taking off and disappearing into the night sky.

Stepping inside it from the garden, the feel of the ground under one's feet suddenly changed, sending a tremor up the spine. You were treading on sand, a thick, rich layer of it, that gave way under your feet and made you feel as if you were sinking into it. The tiered wooden blocks on either side where the audience sat looked like two small rocky islands jutting out of a sea of sand and bracketing an oval pool between them. The performers (beautifully, though somberly costumed by Abul-Futuh in a subtly connotative variety of Upper Egyptian dress) sat on the ground along the base of the two graded wooden brackets, while the old masters occupied the side of the lowest tier next to the entrance. The music struck up, the singing began — rhythmically lulling and swaying at first, then briskly trotting, and finally rushing at a galloping speed. The performers, singly, in twos, threes and fours, or en masse, alternately stood up, stepped into the oval performance space between the tiered, wooden brackets (which fanned out at both ends to create two further, smaller performance spaces), and strove to slow down the rapid flow of the narrative, capture some of its fleeting significant moments, and momentarily fix them and body them forth in the present through movement, voice and gesture. In those scenes, narration and representation were so inextricably intertwined that you could not tell where the one began and the other ended. The thoughts of a character seething with anger, burning with uncertainty, suffering great injustice, experiencing a terrible sense of loss and bereavement, or desperately scouring the desert in search of a long-missing prince (usually expressed in broken monologues, cryptic statements, half-sentences and exclamations) are accompanied and complemented by a stream of narrative, explication and commentary provided in song by the rest of the group.

As the performance progressed, images, vague and stirring, seemed to float up out of the sand, like distant pre-natal recollections, then fade away. Interspersed with bouts of furious joy and primitive sensual energy, expressed in dance and song, the significant spots of time, culled from the rambling, tortuous narrative, merged and separated, counterpointing images of love and hatred, revenge and remorse, submission and defiance, fear and anticipation, separation and reunion, conflict and reconciliation, solitary and communal existence and light and darkness — all the significant themes and moments that make up human existence. Such moments were not offered as a self-contained dramatic sequence, sufficient unto itself, but were deliberately made to look, feel and sound like shiny crystal bubbles that form out of the tensions of the narrative, the clash of its waves and recurrent cycles, and float up dazzlingly only to burst a moment later.

The transience, uncertainty and basic theatricality of the pageant we call life or history were forcefully brought home to the audience twice in the course of the performance: the first time was when, at one side of the tent, the two wings suddenly collapsed, revealing the outside world (the trees and blocks around the British Council, with a small bit of night sky), then, together with the limply dangling centre-piece, heaved up higher than their former level to reveal a very high platform representing the inner quarters (and self) of Khadra El-Sharifa — Abu-Zeid El-Hilali's shamefully wronged mother, and the only person in possession of the secret that can stop the prospective bloodshed and prevent the terrible crime of patricide. The second time was when the two sides of the tent behind the audience seemed to swell, drop lower, then slowly edge towards each other during the stick-fighting duel between Abu-Zeid and his father. It seems that the heavens, in the make-believe world of El-Warsha's Spinning Lives, and inside their tent, are less indifferent to the fate of humanity than the real heavens, or those of Sophocles or Aeschylus. None of the glowering, grim, and inimical skies of Greek tragedy here, and none of its vengeful gods — however much the theatrical mode of El-Warsha's Spinning Lives may be indebted to it. Indeed, I couldn't help thinking sometime during the show how closely it seemed to rub shoulders with Greek tragedy and how much it resembled it in its treatment of its sources, its fierce, primitive passions, rugged beauty, and rough, unpolished nobility.

Like life, Spinning Lives is a teasing, enchanting paradox: it is openly and undisguisedly theatrical and yet deeply and disturbingly real; it is full of art and artifice, yet totally honest and unpretentious. Whatever claims it makes to the truth of its reading of the Hillaliyya epic are severely qualified and proposed in a tentative, provisional manner which implicitly acknowledges that no one interpretation of any phenomenon, artistic or real, can encompass and exhaust all of its meaning. What we get in Spinning Lives is not a, or the, truth, but the shape, form and feel of the experience of the truth — any truth: fleeting glimpses of an evanescent vision composed of flitting patches of light and shadow, momentarily framed by a fictional tent above and a make believe desert beneath.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Kamal Khalifa
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 7.30pm-10.30pm; Fri 7.30pm-10.30pm. Until 13 Feb.

Lara Baladi (Photographs)
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Opening 9 Feb. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 20 Feb.
Works under the title Mon Destin.

Beat Presser (Photographs)
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St (ex-Bustan St), Bab El-Louq. Tel 575 9877. Opening 9 Feb. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 20 Feb.
A selection of photographs by the Swiss artist who worked together with Werner Herzog during the shooting of Fitzcarraldo and Cobra Verde in Peru and Ghana.

Hamid Abdallah (Drawings) & **Fathy Ahmed** (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 21 Feb.

Collective Exhibition
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Opening 9 Feb, 6pm. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 23 Feb.
Sixty-two works by 31 prominent Italian contemporary artists under the title Line-Colour-Dream.

Gazbia Sirry
Akhnaton Gallery, Centre of Arts, 1 El-Maahad El-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Opening 7 Feb. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-9pm. Until 24 Feb.
Paintings under the title Internal Migration.

Margo Veillon
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 25 Feb.
Paintings under the title L'Image du Reve et de L'Imagination.

Jeanette El-Wakeel
Sony Gallery, American University in Cairo, Main Campus, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 26 Feb.
Thirty-six colour photographs by the American photographer portraying life, especially of children, on the streets, lanes, fields and marketplaces in and around Cairo.

Abdel-Wahab Mursi (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Opening 10 Feb, 7pm. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. Until 27 Feb.
Works under the title Egyptian Sonnet.

Abdel-Wahab Mursi

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

FILMS

Buddies
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 5 Feb, 6pm.
Directed by Yasuo Furuhata.

Films by Werner Herzog with Klaus Kinski
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 575 9877. Films start at 6.30pm.
9 Feb: **Fitzcarraldo** (1981).
10 Feb: **Cobra Verde** (1987).
11 Feb: **Aguirre** (1972).

Le Destin
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 9 &11 Feb, 7pm; 10 Feb, 6.30pm.
Directed by Youssef Chahine.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Ressala Ila Al-Wali (Message to the Wali)
Drive In, entrance of El-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0831. Daily 6.30pm & 9.30pm; Thur & Fri midnight show. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Odeon I, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tiba I & II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Adel Imam and Youssra, directed by Sherif Arafa.

Tamania wa Arbe'in Saa Fi Isra'il (48 Hours in Israel)
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Nadia El-Guindi and Farouq El-Fishawi, directed by Nader Galal.

Hysteria
Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am,1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
With Ahmed Zaki and Abla Kamel, directed by Adel Adib.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
The largest box-office hit in the history of Egyptian cinema, with Hanan Tork, Khaled El-Nabawi, Mohamed Heneidi and singer Mohamed Fouad.

DANCE

Le Corsaire
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 11 Feb, 11am.
The Cairo Opera Ballet Company, choreographed by Abdel-Moneim Kamel, and the Cairo Opera Orchestra, conducted by Ivan Filev, perform.

MUSIC

Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya Sq, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 5 Feb, 9pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Munich Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 5 & 6 Feb, 8pm.

Yehia Ghanem Group
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 6 Feb, 8pm.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 7 Feb, 8pm.
Compositions by Ravel, Beethoven and Mahler performed by Muza Rubackyte and conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi.

Violin and Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 7 Feb, 8pm.
Waleed El-Hamamsy and Tamer Talaat perform.

Around Tosca
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 7 Feb, 8.30pm.
Lyrical recital.

Csaba Kiraly
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 392 9956. 7 Feb, 9pm & All Saints' Cathedral (behind Marriott Hotel), Zamalek. 9 Feb, 7.30pm.
The prominent Hungarian piano and organ artist performs compositions by Beethoven, Stravinsky and Liszt and others by Bach Mozart.

Oboe and Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 8 Feb, 8pm.
Ashraf Afifi performs.

Kumho String Quartet
Gomhouriya Theatre, as above. 9 & 10 Feb, 9pm.

Chamber Music
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. 11 Feb, 8pm.
Barbara Comar (soprano) and Mona Zaki (piano) perform works by Mozart, Chopin, Rachmaninov, Finzi, Brahms and others.

THEATRE

El-Tayeb Wel-Sherrir (The Good and The Bad)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily, 10pm.
Yehia El-Fakharani, Sawsan Badr, Mohamed Metwalli and Sayed Azmi perform under the direction of Ahmed Abdel-Halim, in a play scripted by Alfred Farag with songs written by Gamal Bekhit.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm; Thur, 9.30pm.
With Salah El-Saadani, Samah Anwar, Mahmoud El-Guendi, Ashraf Abdel-Baqi, Hala Fakher, Hussein El-Imam, Hassan El-Asmar and Sommaya.

Allahom Eg'aloh Kheir (May All End Well)
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 390 7707. Daily 9.30pm.
Scripted by Lenin El-Ramly, with poetry by Sayed Hegab, the play is directed by Mohsen Helmy. With Ali El-Haggar, Rania Farid Shawqi, Ashraf Abdel-Ghafour, Abdel-Rahman Abu Zahra.

Alabanda
El-Fardous Theatre, El-Beouth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 9.30pm.
With bellydancer Dina, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Sherif Mounir, Mohamed Heneidi, Alaa Waleieddin, Magda Zaki, Magda Zaki, Ahmed El-Saqqa, Ahmed Aql and Hani Ramzi.

Wallah Zaman Ya Fatma (It's Been So Long, Fatma)
El-Salam Theatre, Youssef Idris Hall, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 10pm.
Abir El-Sharqawi, Mohamed Abdel-Razeq and Mohamed Abdin perform in a production scripted by Fouad Haggag and directed by Hossameddin Salah.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 3863952. Daily 8.30; Wed & Thur, 10pm.
With Adel Imam.

LECTURES

The History of Cyprus
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 5 Feb, 6pm.
Discussion around Dr Ahmed Etman's book (*The History of Cyprus*) by Professor Hassanein Rabie, vice president of Cairo University, and Dr Wissam Abdel-Aziz Farag, head of the Literature Department at Mansoura University, with guest of honour Professor Said Ashour, president of the Society of Arab Historians.
The discussion will be followed by the projection of Alexander the Great, directed by Roberto Rossen.

The Use of Multimedia Technology in Archaeological Research
Italian Cultural Institute, as above. 10 Feb, 6pm.
Lecture by Professor A. Andreucci, University of Pisa.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Hassan Darwish

EXHIBITION space at **Al-Hanager** was given over in January to a posthumous retrospective of works by the artist **Hassan Darwish**. At his premature death, Darwish, a multi-talented artist and academic, had left a distinguished mark in many genres — theatre decor, costumes, masks, portraits. It is a consolation to know that Darwish lived long enough to see his work garner many awards and certificates of merit both locally and internationally. The works seen at Al-Hanager were mostly examples of portraiture. Executed in a variety of styles, these portraits are invariably ornate and bear out Darwish's fascination with folkloric subjects.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

When three is no crowd

What's on at the cinema?
Khairiya El-Bishlawi looks at the *Eid* releases

In a children's television programme during Ramadan a four-year-old child was pictured enthusiastically chanting the song *Kamananah*. Almost as recently, and on the National Day of Childhood, I overheard the children in the school next door to my apartment, accompanied by their teachers, all chanting the same song. The word *Kamananah* itself has no meaning. It has, though, become a catch-all expression with a significance that cuts across gender and class.

The song, of course, made its debut in the film *Ismailiya Raih Gai*, which has so far taken some LE9 million at the box-office. On release for six months now, it continues to top box-office receipts in the face of stiff competition from films premiered during the *Eid*.

By all standards, *Ismailiya Raih Gai* is a second rate movie, replete with mediocre acting and simplistic direction. The *Eid*, one might assume, since it is the time that major films are released, would have presented a perfect opportunity for it to be deposed from the top box-office slot.

What other options, then, has the *Eid* presented? The major premieres include the Nadia El-Guindi vehicle *Forty Eight Hours in Israel*, Adel Imam's *A Message to the Wali*, and Ahmed Zaki's *Hysteria*. All three contain stars known for their box-office appeal. At this stage, then, it is possibly a little premature to predict that *Ismailiya Raih Gai* will retain its position. One thing, though, appears certain: a star cast is now no guarantor of a film's success and the drawing power of a great many household names appears to be waning.

The three films being premiered exhibit a tendency to cling to the well tried formula of the star vehicle, attempting to entice the audience, often crudely, with a great deal of dancing, singing and, it must be admitted, a deal of plastic surgery. A fierce battle appears to be being waged, as the top-rank of actors slug it out, and a new generation of box-office stars appears to be emerging.

Younger audiences seem to be less drawn to films simply because of their casts. Yet quite what this audience is looking for remains far from clear?

Oddly, of the three *Eid* premiers, two come from the same director, Nader Galal, an old hand, while the third, *Hysteria*, marks the debut of director Adel Adib. If early results are anything to go by, Nadia El-Guindi's *Forty Eight Hours in Israel* appears to be leading by a short head, followed by *A Message to the Wall*.

Galal's films are invariably fast-paced and he has worked extensively with both Nadia El-Guindi and Adel Imam. *Forty Eight Hours in Israel* continues the pattern of the director's collaboration with El-Guindi, who once again assumes the superwoman persona whose previous outings include *Mission in Tel Aviv*. In the current vehicle, El-Guindi plays the widow of an officer killed in the 1967 War who happens to be an athletics trainer and the product of a miserable childhood, having lost both her parents in the 1958 Tripartite Aggression. Her only relative is a brother who lives in Greece and works, unbeknownst to her, for Egyptian intelligence.

The film takes place between 1967 and '73, ending with the crossing of the Suez Canal. The film uses documentary footage of the October War and the breaching of the Bar Lev Line, and ends with a written message flashed on the screen, announcing that the struggle continues.

The response elicited by the film from the audience is perhaps more interesting than the film itself. In the constant cheering and booing, we see just how the film touches a sensitive nerve in the Arab psyche despite the ongoing peace process. No matter how farcical, how fantastic, how mythologised the vision presented, it seems that every film these days must encompass a political dimension.



Adel Imam in *A Message to the Wali*; Ahmed Zaki in *Hysteria*

A Message to the Wali, with Adel Imam, serves to confirm this. Imam plays an Arab "knight" who lived in Rashid in 1807. Yet Imam's character is so remote from any knightly or heroic characteristics as to become a rather laboured caricature of the stereotyped Arab glutton and sensualist one most commonly finds in Western films.

Imam's knight arrives in Cairo to meet Mohamed Ali, in order to request military help against British attempts to occupy Rashid. By some miracle, though, Imam actually arrives in the Cairo of the late 20th century. The film deliberately confuses flights of historical fantasy with a crude portrayal of current realities, a juxtaposition that is supposed to give rise to the film's comic moments. Our knight, perhaps a little predictably, finds life in our present, which for him is no more than a distant future, to be impossible. He thus returns to the past, with the help of a woman with whom he has fallen in love. Yet before returning, the knight from Rashid makes an appeal to President Mubarak, warning him of a foreign enemy, lying on the borders, threatening the life and history of Egypt. It is crude, contradictory and inconsistent.

Hysteria, Adel Adib's directorial debut, takes a far more lyrical direction. Ahmed Zaki plays a musician, well versified in the traditions of Arabic music. He is a devotee of art, poetry and people. His existence, though, has been an essay in tragedy. His father, in his insistence on honesty, lives in poverty. His mother, ground down by constantly struggling to make ends meet, no longer believes in love. His brother, meanwhile, makes a living by dressing as a woman to seduce and subsequently rob other men. His sister has been left on the shelf, too poor to marry the man she loves.

Ahmed Zaki's desire to lead a normal life becomes a kind of madness in this context — though it is madness as antidote to the hysterical pursuit of base necessities that surrounds him. His insistence on producing Arabic music, however absurd it may seem, acts as an avenue to salvation.

Hysteria self-consciously contrasts the mores of today's rich and poor, and there can be no mistaking where our sympathies are intended to lie. It is, unfortunately, over long, and rather too rambling. An ambitious attempt to move beyond traditional narratives, it fails in its ambitions. Yet as a debut for Adib, it bodes well.

Flotsam and jetsam

David Blake looks forward to a changing of tides



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Floating by, borne by the tides, everything bubbles and sparkles. Moving in with it and sailing out with it, sometimes as quick as possible. Away, away, as the life pressures mount.

Things, some small, some bulky and grandiose, like sound waves, evidence that we are in the music world. Listening, therefore is planktonic. It's a small activity that copes with big things. Plankton feeds whales — and opera houses. The planktonic life is lazy but can be exciting, because listening lets the others do the work, while the listeners collect the dividends — precious sometimes for life, the returns increasing with the years. With one authentic kick a year you can keep going. No kicks, no bubbles — and you are a down-going listener, a dud.

The Cairo Opera House Culture Centre as organism offers its share of duds, but of late, also a fair proportion of kicks, the ones that last. The Opera House abides in an earthly space, shaped rather like the conch shell of the Greek gods with a surrounding territory, a unique isolation that stresses its removal from ordinary life. The country, indeed the whole region where it lies has no comparable conch.

Cairo Opera has something beyond shells. It has a direct and actual contact with musical genius — Verdi who, like Bach, Mozart and Wagner, is an untouchable phenomenon of global status. These forces, floating things, have nothing to do with culture. Culture is a fond aberration of the academic mind. It positively builds barriers, while art leaps over them. Verdi can be understood by Nile or Amazon, in Alp or Sahara. Just put his works in an opera house, a palace of insanity, and watch cultural differences melt away.

The Cairo Opera is advancing slowly but perceptibly. It begins to be an entity of its own, growing an atmosphere which confounds all the prophecies of gloom and despondency. It pulsates, a monster, hopefully soon a sacred one. It feeds on itself and increases outside time and place. These palaces feed on every known calamity except fire. Even financial scandals positively nourish them. They are the phoenixes which rise out of their own ashes, as the Cairo one has done. They are even tougher than banks for clinging to their status positions in great cities, again as the present one has done, occupying a hunk of the best real estate in Cairo. These Opera Palaces take time to evolve. So far, Cairo has not done a bad job, facing a world drought of singers. And the new director, Mustafa Nagui, looks as though he might be the best man for the job.

Already, after a few months comes a new feel. He lit up the palace gardens over Christmas and introduced tree lighting for New Year's Eve, and has opened up the once Byzantine corridors leading to his point of vantage in the Opera House interior. Things are beginning to buzz. There are people around getting new takes on the Cairo Opera as phenomenon — after all it belongs to them. So far so good. Perhaps Mustafa Nagui is the new man with the magnet and the net to bring shiny people into the place.

Nagui has the magic garden around him. Hopefully he may be a bit of a magician, like Klingsor, who also had a magic garden though it was full of lies which only disappeared when someone — Parsifal — told the truth. That's life. At least operatic lies do have truths at the centre and Nagui will surely stand his ground under fire.

The Cairo musical year is about half finished. Ramadan, however, neatly slices the months to suit its own positioning. And post Ramadan there are some hopeful promises. The Munich Symphony Orchestra plays an interesting programme of rarely heard pierces from 4 to 7 February. *Le Corsaire* ballet by the Cairo Opera Company, conducted by Ivan Filev, has six performances from 11 to 16 February. Then comes *Aida*, the Cairo Opera version, not the Luxor, which introduces an interesting American star from the Berlin Opera, Carol Bayers, in the leading role.

In the Small Hall on 14 February is a song recital of Italian opera scenes by most of the younger singers of the Cairo Opera. A full audience is their greatest stimulus. In the same hall the Akhenaten Chamber Orchestra at 8pm on the last Friday of every month gives Sherif Mohieddin's opera *Three Operas in One Hour* to a text by Youssef Idris. This is exciting and far out, and a change for the *La Boheme* fans. The Amadeus Chamber Orchestra gives a Seventh Birthday Concert conducted by Mustafa Nagui on 21 February with one of Cairo's great soloists, Mohamed Hamdi, doing a clarinet concerto.

In the Gomhouriya comes the company Vuka Uzibuse — Zulu dancers, in what they call dances and drumming. Note them clearly, because the Zulu are hair-raising in any theatre. They stormed London a few years ago with an historic, sensational *Macbeth* at the National.

March is a ballet month. On the 4th the Cairo Opera shows *Swan Lake* conduced by Mustafa Nagui in Abdel-Moneim Kamel's new production. The 7th shows Bengt Ake Lundin, one of Cairo's best ever visiting pianists, in El-Shawan's piano concerto, conducted by Said Awad. On the 12th comes the much postponed production of *The Barber of Seville*. A mixed cast conducted by Alicio Vlad with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra. After the *Barber* has hovered about for a while comes a concert of the Cairo Symphony Orchestra called Oriental Inspiration, with compositions by Rageh Daoud, Takemistu, Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky, with Ramzi Yassa at the piano and conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi.

Two more *Barbers*, and then it is here again — the Bolshoi, the real one again, from 18 to 29 March in the Main Hall. They bring two productions, *Don Quixote* for five performances, and then — *en gala*, at last — the Tchaikovsky masterpiece, the *Sleeping Beauty*. This gives five performances with as yet no specially mentioned danseuse. It doesn't matter by whom: it should be seen.

The Small Hall opens March with one of Egypt's more interesting pianists, Yasser Mukhtar. Included in this month is another concert with a special Egyptian pianist, Ahmed Abu Zahra, music by Stravinsky and Richard Strauss, conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi. Young people get their head on the 24th. In the Gomhouriya for March is the Koffi Koko Dance Company from Benin.

April brings an important appearance of Russian pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy. On the 3rd, Akhenaten Chamber Orchestra gives its Sixth Anniversary Concert of music by Bach, Mozart and Sherif Mohieddin. This is a strongly arranged programme with the cream of Cairo's musicians conducted by Richard Edlinger. Saturday the 4th brings Mahler's 6th Symphony, conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi. Unmissable.

The 7 April, a selection of works from Abdel-Rehim, including his *Osiris Ballet* with the Cairo Opera Ballet Company, the Cairo Opera Orchestra conducted by Mustafa Nagui and Sherif Mohieddin. Ca the 13th, a visit from Les Ballets de Monte Carlo with *Romeo and Juliette* for five performances. Saturday the 14th — again unmissable: the Cairo Symphony Orchestra conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi playing Debussy and Strauss with Mohamed Hamdi the clarinet soloist in the latter. The 21 April brings *The Merry Widow* — three widows, guess who, and Hassan Kami as the prince, conducted by Mustafa Nagui. It is good, they treat the music with great love. The 26th brings a Moushira Issa piano recital.

Then at the Small Hall on the 12th, soloists of Cairo Symphony Orchestra in Mendelssohn and Schubert. Their last concert was delectable. Hopefully, again, unmissable. The 14th — the Tcherepnin Guitar Quartet from Belgium. Sunday 20 brings the Egyptian Youth concert, with an interesting group playing brave music. Three days later, on 23 April, brings the Cairo Chamber Orchestra, playing Handel, Mendelssohn and Bartok with conductor and piano soloist Wolfgang Schrader. The 24th, Friday, is Music for All — a matinee performance introducing music played by Mohamed Hamdi, clarinet, Manal Mohieddin, harp, conducted by Ivan Filev. A useful concert, these occasions are always full of happy music.

May begins with Cairo Symphony Orchestra in Shostakovich, conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi. 7 May is again *Don Quixote* with the Cairo Opera Orchestra and Ballet, conducted by Taha Nagui. On 15 May, a concert at the Sound and Light area at the Pyramids in Giza, with Malvina Major soprano, music from New Zealand and Hassan Kami. The 16 May is the Cairo Symphony Orchestra in music of Saint-Saens and Berlioz, with soloist Vinh Pham, conductor Dominique Fanal. On the 19th *Anas El-Wogoud* conducted by Youssef El-Sisi. On 23 May, the Cairo Symphony Orchestra plays music by Bajoros and Dvorak with Medhat Abdel-Salam as solo violin, conducted by Servenikas Robertas. On 27 May: *Concerto Ballet Carmen*, by a ballet company from Puerto Rico. Then on the 30th, Cairo Symphony Orchestra, music by Lorenzo Ferandez, conducted by Fiorentino Dias.

At the Small Hall is a violin and piano recital by Hassan Sharara. On the 5th is the musical *Phantom of the Opera* with piano accompaniment rather than orchestra. Two days later, and La Plautina, from Italy, provide dramatic music. Manal Mohieddin returns on the 10th in a harp recital.

And then its over as far as things of interest are concerned. The rest of June sees a few items from the repertoire — *La Boheme, Romeo and Juliet* — you've seen them before, you'll see then again. But the Nile calls even in the summer heat, with open-air diversions as well as the concerts up in the hills, at the Citadel, where music invariably loses out to the winds. And down below, they freshen up the opera centre. Things are moving, as a perusal of the events listed above indicate. And there are rumours — *Turandot*, Puccini's last and possibly finest work, and *Paolo and Francesca*, a ballet to be choreographed by Abdel-Moneim Kamel, to the blood splattered legend to which Tchaikovsky brought a stupendous surge of savagery. The stage of the opera will have to accommodate the grand manner.

The course is set, the writing is on the wall, and good luck to the new helmsman, Mustafa Nagui.

Plain Talk

The name of Dr Gamal Mukhtar will always be linked with Egyptology and archaeological activities at large. As head of the then Egyptian Antiquities Organisation, a post which he held for many years, he managed to turn the place into a beehive of activity. His tenure infused it with a new energy and under his direction it changed from an archaic and somewhat moribund institution into a true centre for Egyptological awareness.

In Dr Mukhtar's capable hands, archaeology metamorphosed from a stilted and all too often dry subject into a captivating narrative with a wide appeal. It was Dr Mukhtar who took the first, courageous step, of allowing our antiquities to be shown abroad in touring exhibitions. This he did in the face of great opposition by those diehards who argued that our monuments were sacred and that sending them abroad would expose them to damage.

But Dr Mukhtar's decision proved perspicacious. The precious pieces went to all corners of the globe: Japan, the Philippines, America, Britain, Belgium, France and elsewhere. They went and came back safe and sound, and they left in their wake the glittering name of Egypt and its ancient civilisation. The publicity the exhibitions achieved counter-acted the anti-propaganda directed against our country at some of the more difficult moments in our modern history.

Foreign exhibitions of the treasures from the Tomb of Tutankhamun generated an amount of publicity for Egypt that would have been impossible to buy. The American exhibition of these treasures, at the New York Metropolitan Museum created a virtual cult. Replicas of the pharaoh's jewellery became fashion items, and T-shirts with his image sold by the thousand.

In my capacity as undersecretary of state for foreign relations I had the pleasure of working directly with Dr Mukhtar and we engaged in cooperative ventures on several occasions. I particularly remember a trip we made to the Philippines to inaugurate an exhibition. Dr Mukhtar gave a dazzling account of the exhibits on the opening night, captivating the president of the Philippines.

On another occasion we were in Brussels together, attending an exhibition that was opened by the king of Belgium. Nothing could have looked more splendid than the objects that were being exhibited, and they were beautifully displayed on acres of deep blue velvet. When it was decided to send the exhibition centred on Ramses the Great to the US, American cities lobbied in their hundreds for the privilege of hosting the show. Memphis, in Tennessee, sent a special delegation to Cairo and I received a telephone call from the mayor, who told me that his re-election depended on securing the exhibition. The exhibition was staged in Tennessee, and the mayor was duly re-elected.

As the editor of three books on Egypt it was to Dr Mukhtar that I automatically turned in commissioning pieces on ancient history. The chapters he produced were among the highlights of the volumes.

The passing away of Dr Gamal Mukhtar will leave a great many mourners. It also leaves an enormous gap, not only at the Higher Council for Culture, the National Specialised Council and L'Institut d'Egypte, august bodies on which he sat, but also in the wider world of Egyptology.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Book Fair seminar programme:

The 30th Cairo International Book Fair begins today at the International Fair Grounds, Nasr City. Below is the main seminar programme. Additional programmes are organised at the Cultural Café, together with a focus on new writers. Daily listings will be available at the venue.

Fri 6

12-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Al-Thaqafa Wal-Tagadud (Culture and Renewal)
Author Fawzi Fahmi discusses his book with Nehad Selaiha, Anwar Mugheith, Shaker Abdel-Hamid, Sami Khashaba and Magdi Tewfik
2.30-4.30pm
Seminar on "Egypt at the Turn of the Century"
Panelists: Ahmed Abdel-Moeti Hegazi, Hazem El-Biblawi, Ossama El-Ghazali Harb, Mona Abu Sinna and Bahaa Taher
5-7pm
Open forum with Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni. Theme: "Culture and the development of the national economy". Panelists: Ossama El-Ghazali Harb, Sabri El-Shabrawi and Abdel-Raouf El-Ridi
7-9pm
Testimonies: Anis Mansour
9pm
Poetry reading. Guests of honour: Ahmed Abdel-Moeti Hegazi (Egypt), Soliman El-Issa (Syria) and Mohamed Benniss (Morocco). Readings also by Hassan Talib, Gamal El-Qassas, Mahmood Nessim, Walid Mounir and Ibrahim Daoud

Sat 7

12-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Al-Talim Wal-Mustaqbal (Education and the Future)
Author Hussein Kamal Bahaaeddin discusses his book with Ossama El-Ghazali Harb, Hamed Ammar and Ragab El-Banna
2.30-4.30pm
Seminar on "Egyptian Identity Between Arabism and Middle-Easternism"
Panelists: Hossam Issa, Abdel-Ani Mohamed, Nabil Abdel-Fattah and Reda Shehata
5-7pm
Open forum with Minister of Information Safwat El-Sherif. Theme: "The media and the third millenium". Panelists: Amin Bassiouni, Kamel Zoheiri and Samir Ragab
7-9pm
Testimonies: Samir Ragab
9pm
Poetry reading. Guests of honour: Ezzeddin Al-Manasra (Palestine) and Farouk Shousha (Egypt). Readings also by: Wafaa Wagdi, Samir Abdel-Baqi and Mohamed Fahmi

Sun 8

12-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Dawr Al-Dawla Fil-Iqtisad (The Role of the State in Economy)
Author Hazem El-Biblawi discusses his book with Hossam Issa and Ibrahim El-Moallim
2.30-4.30pm
Seminar on "Political participation and domacratic progress"
Panelists: Hala Mustafa, Mahmoud Abaza, Rifaat El-Said, Noman Gomaa and Salah Qabadia
5-7pm
Open forum with Minister of Health Ismail Salam. Panelists: Mahfouz El-Ansari, Adel-Imam, Mohamed Sharaf and Mahmoud El-Tohami
7-9pm
Testimonies: Mohamed Enani
9pm
Poetry reading. Guests of honour: Abdallah El-Bardoni (Yemen), Mohamied El-Tohami (Egypt) and Nazih Kheir (Palestine). Readings also by: Ibrahim Issa, Iman Bakr, Abdel-Moneim 'Awwad and Youssri El-Azab

Mon 9

12-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Al-Istinsakh Bayn Al-Ilm Wal-Din (Cloning Between Science and Religion)
Author Abdel-Hadi Misbah discusses his book with Magdi Fahmi, Momina Kamel, Omaima Khafagi and Hisham Abul-Nasr
2.30-4.30pm
Seminar on "Development and social justice: issues of privatisation and the social dimension"
Panelists: Ramzi Zaki, Abdel-Moneim Seoudi, Adel-Hamouda, Mona Qassim and Raouf Tewfik
5-7pm
Open forum with Minister of Tourism Mamdouh Beltagui. Panelists: Salah Montassir, Adel-Hamouda, Mohamed Nessim and Mustafa Bakri
7-9pm
Testimonies: Mahmoud El-Saadani
9pm
Poetry reading. Guests of honour: Elias Lahhoud (Lebanon), Mohamed El-Harbi (Saudi Arabia) and Malak Abdel-Aziz (Egypt). Readings also by: Hassan Fath El-Bab, Ramadan Abdel-Alim, Saad Abdel-Rahman, Mohamed El-Shahhat and Nassar Abdullah

Tues 10

12-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Al-Gharb Wal-Islam (Islam and the West)
Author Ragab El-Banna discusses his book with Ahmed Farrag, Ahmed Heikal and El-Sayed Eleiwa
2.30-4.30pm
Seminar on "Out of the valley: development issues in Egypt"
Panelists: Gamal Badawi, Rushdi Said, Fayek Abdel-Sayed, Sabri El-Shabrawi and Mahmoud Abu Zeid
5-7pm
Open forum with Minister of Endowments Hamdi Zaqzouq. Theme: "Islam and the challenges of a new century". Panelists: Ahmed Abdel-Moeti Hegazi, Atef El-Iraqi, Ahmed Kamal Abul-Magd and Mohamed Anwar Farahat
7-9pm
Testimonies: Salah Taher
9pm
Poetry reading. Guests of honour: Mohieddin Al-Laziqani (Syria) and Farouk Goweida (Egypt). Readings also by: Ahmed Taha, Fouad Taman and Maged Youssef

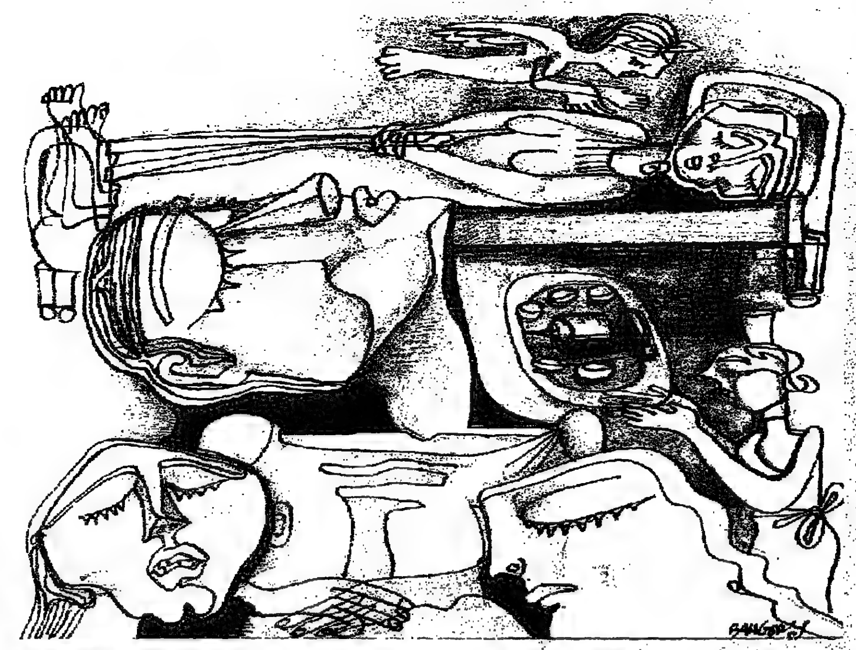
Wed 11

12-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Masr Fi-Asr Mubarak (Egypt Under Mubarak)
Author Abdel-Azim Ramadan discusses his book with Ossama El-Ghazali Harb, Sami Khashaba and El-Sayed Yassin
2.30-4.30pm
Seminar on "The Arab common market"
Panelists: Gouda Abdel-Khalek, Hassan Ibrahim, Abdel-Moneim Radi and Feisal Khaled
5-7pm
Open forum with Minister of Higher Education Moufid Shehab. Theme: "The university, scientific research and Egypt's future". Panelists: Farkhanda Hassan, Hassan Hosni and Mohamed Awad Tageddin
7-9pm
Testimonies: Nur El-Sherif
9pm
Poetry reading

Thurs 12

12-2pm
Author and work seminar:
"Ana Wal-Nissa" (Women and I)
Author Kamel Zoheiri discusses his book with Iqbal Baraka, Lewis Greiss and Fatma Moussa
2.30-4.30pm
Seminar on "Global economy"
5-7pm
Open forum with Governor of Cairo Abdel-Rehim Shehata
7-9pm
Testimonies: Nizar Qabbani
9pm
Poetry reading

All information correct at time of going to press, though changes to programme are likely to occur



Coma!

Patients entering the operating room are often afraid they will never wake up. This nightmare scenario, reports **Mariz Tadros**, is not necessarily unfounded

The discovery of a bad batch of fluothane anaesthetic in 17 private hospitals is currently under investigation by the state general prosecutor. The fluothane bottles contained chloroform, a highly toxic substance banned from medical use fifty years ago. Doctors had noticed that some patients were taking longer than usual to wake up from anaesthesia and suffered *unusual symptoms after awaking*. After tests were conducted, it appeared that the substance in the bottles was not pure fluothane, but had been diluted with chloroform. It appears that the counterfeit fluothane bottles had been purchased from a distributor and not directly from the manufacturer. Since the bad batch was found only in private hospitals, the question was how the anaesthetic had been contaminated, and how the substance had been acquired.

Last week, following the scandal, Minister of Health Dr Ismail Sallam announced that any institution, *hospital or pharmacy found in possession* of counterfeit drugs would be closed down immediately. The scandal broke when *Al-Ahram* published a story stating that a *dangerous substitute for fluothane had* been bottled and sold as anaesthetic, claiming two lives.

Dr Abdel-Rahman Mahmoud, professor of anaesthesiology at Cairo University, had personally reported the problem to the minister of health. Although the issue was only made public last week, Mahmoud had noted strange symptoms in his patients as far back as September last year. A one-and-a-half-year-old baby girl had woken up two hours after an operation in convulsions, and had started vomiting severely. "It was so bad that in the end she was spitting blood," he said. She is one of four patients, all children, in whom he witnessed side effects. Instead of waking up *after quarter of an hour, it took two* or three hours; the patient would suffer convulsions, followed by prolonged vomiting. "Other anaesthetists were calling me up, anxious about the symptoms that their patients were showing," says Mahmoud.

Mahmoud called up the pharmaceutical company from which he had purchased the anaesthetic, and which he describes as a British firm operating under license in Egypt. Company representatives told him that they, too, had received complaints about the fluothane bottles. The batch which *they had identified as having been* contaminated, however, had been sealed differently from the bottles released by the licensed agent in Egypt, which means it could not *have originated from the agent*. Mahmoud took a sample to a private laboratory, which revealed that the substance in the container was not pure fluothane.

Mahmoud is convinced that the bad batch was bought from a private distributor or pharmacy which must have sold the bottles to private hospitals for less than the standard price. "There should be more rigorous periodic inspections of private hospitals and they should be restricted to buying only from the Ministry of Health. Buying from distributors is too great a risk," he advised.

Gamila Moussa, head of the pharmaceutical administration at the Ministry of Health, told the *Weekly that, although bottles from* the batch had been found in 17 hospitals, this does not mean that they were all bad. She denied that the counterfeit drug had caused any *fatalities*, saying that the incident had been hyped up by the media. "This has clearly been blown out of proportion. It was just one incident and it has been dealt with — we immediately recalled the whole batch. This kind of thing happens all the time in other countries."

Moussa asserted that rigorous inspections of pharmacies are conducted continually via the health *directorates. Intent on downplaying* the incident, she compared the counterfeit anaesthetics to "a drug dealer selling drugs to youth or bad food poisoning children at school." *Moussa explained that* taskforces have been launched, together with the Ministry of Trade and Supply, to check up on unregistered medicine, which is usually *smuggled, and which is in* violation of both pharmaceutical law and commercial fraud law. "Most counterfeiting operations are conducted outside pharmacies, through private distributors for example," she said, emphasising that public hospitals cannot buy their supply of anaesthesia or any other medicine from distributors. Public hospitals, she explained, get their medicine directly through the Ministry of Health, through bids. Moussa stressed that this is the safest source. As for private hospitals, it *is not mandatory for them to buy* from the ministry: they are free to buy their supplies from private distributors.

Zakariya Gad, head of the Pharmacists' Syndicate, told the *Weekly* that the Syndicate does not have the authority to inspect private hospitals. He contended that the process of providing and distributing medical supplies to private hospitals should be subject to more stringent regulatory measures. "Any hospital with more than forty beds should have its own pharmacy. This is not the case, and they just don't care that much *about where they get their supplies* from," Gad asserted.

Dr Samir Fahmi, head of the Pharmacology Department at Cairo University's Faculty of Pharmacy, told the *Weekly* that, although counterfeit medicine is not a new phenomenon, "when it happens it has some very serious ramifications." Fahmi, who saw a sample from the batch himself, said that, apart from a minor error on the label, there were no noticeable indicators that the contents were contaminated. "The bottle contained chloroform, a type of anesthetic which is highly toxic. It affects the blood, the heart and is especially dangerous for patients who have renal and liver problems. It *went out of use after the Second* World War and we even stopped using it on animals in our department's laboratories thirty years ago because we were scared that *we would be affected if we inhaled* even a little."

Fahmi stressed that independent medical supply offices are a culprit whose operations have long gone unchecked. Although they are not licensed to sell medicine, they do it all the time, he said. Counterfeiting medicine is also possible due to the failure to dispose properly of used containers in hospitals. Empty containers, he warned, should be destroyed immediately so that garbage collectors are unable to resell them to private distributors. According to Fahmi, this practice is quite common.

Galal Ghorab, chairman of the Holding Company for Pharmaceuticals, Chemicals and Medical Appliances, said that when supplies are purchased from an "alien" agent, "you cannot guarantee the results". There are legitimate government sources, he said, and once other outlets are allowed to operate in the market, "you can expect almost anything". Smuggled and counterfeit drugs, Ghorab claimed, have cost his company LE50-100 million.



It takes an intern...

The White House, it seems, is not the sort of village Hillary Clinton was referring to. Last week was clearly momentous for the presidency of the United States and, given the flurry of media activity which surrounded the affair, much more newsworthy than many other weeks when *nothing* more exciting than the fate of entire regions was on hand to report on.

The global audience remained glued to their TV sets while a 21-year-old woman, who had allegedly committed the cardinal sin of attempting to seduce the president of the most powerful country in the world, was quickly *indicted on* screen. The newspapers duly followed suit.

The president, one was *led to believe*, did not really encourage the fascination of the intern (his own interest, in fact, apparently stemmed from his natural generosity; he could well have "noticed" her out of the sheer goodness of his heart, gullible viewers were informed); if he did yield to the enticements of his worshipper, on *the other hand* — and many of the president's supporters hastened to inject a large measure *of doubt at this particular point* — well, as we all know, boys will be boys and it takes a woman to lead a virtuous man astray; the villain, then, as we may have guessed by now, has always been the cheeky intern. *She alone, the media decided*, would have to bear the responsibility of any infamous acts which may or may not have taken place in the west wing of the White House. America needs an untarnished leader, and, as for the intern, she can just disappear.

While awaiting her comeuppance, and to *prepare her for humiliations* to come, some public vilification was therefore in order. *Smarter* than the press, the First Lady was prompt to accuse political opponents of having organised a spot of trouble for her notoriously philandering husband. The news pundits didn't buy it, of course. *To reduce such a juicy scandal to* political manoeuvring was to trivialise the matter, depriving them of the chance to use all the snide and sexist *bon mots* they had been saving up for just such an opportunity.

The American press, while berating sexism in others, are not strangers to the prejudice themselves. *Once more, it has* come in handy. A character assassination operation was soon underway; the intern suitably demonised, was described as a tease, excitable, unbalanced, prone to telling tall tales involving sexual encounters with the rich and the famous — all feminine failings, as we well know; everyone *suddenly* remembered that she had been observed actively conniving to *cross the president's path when at all possible*. Furthermore, she had, on occasion, and especially around the White House, worn revealing dresses out of which she appeared ready to "burst"; a few kind souls, moreover, remarked that she was definitely "too fat" for the refined tastes of the president.

The word "alleged" was rarely heard when reference was being made to the intern's dark designs. Old pictures popped up in which the seductress seemed to be exchanging two words of greeting with the head of state. The only conspicuous garment in these images was a puerile cap, not a sexy *bathing suit, and, if the dress below the cap was revealing*, its tightness obviously did not strike photographers at the time. On the basis of this "evidence", the media went to work, promising the public far juicier tidbits about this Delilah who, according to well-seasoned reporters and news analysts, *could well rob the boyish president, if not of his expertly* coiffed head of hair, then of his capacity to make the citizens of the United States happy and prosperous. *Cherchez la femme* etc... One cannot but notice that the president was never annoyed enough by the furore to actually forget to threaten Iraq.

Intern or no intern, it seemed to be business as usual in the US. The young woman was obviously no Mrs Simpson, nor did she seem to have wanted to provoke the slightest disturbance at any time. While no one came out in her defence or pointed out that she had never been willing to expose the president, mature men in crucial government positions held endless press conferences to declare their undying allegiance to the victimised hero. According to the media and the president's entourage, it was this young woman who, alone, had committed a most heinous crime, akin to treason.

Thousands of teenagers, boys and girls, whose character is in no way *flawed, engage every day, everywhere, in a bit of* hero worshipping. They are star-stricken by actors, actresses, teachers and public figures. Their behaviour is not noticeably different from that of the accused. They daydream, collect pictures and go a long way to glimpse their idol in the flesh. *Nothing usually comes of it*, the object of their adoration remaining unaware of the attention lavished on him/her, or being mildly amused or flattered. If the president was indeed attracted to poor Monica Lewinsky, and if the American public cannot bear the idea of being ruled by a man who possesses *ordinary people's instincts*, then they should begin examining the moral standards at work here, which, to the rest of the world, appear to be tinted with a large dose of hypocrisy. Maybe by ignoring their golden boy's antics and forgiving — or disregarding — his ordinary, harmless weaknesses, they *would liberate him* from the deadly frustrations which seem to obscure his vision at times. In this way, they would perhaps prevent the First Lady's global village from plunging into the abyss toward which it seems to be hurtling at top speed, courtesy of arbitrarily spiteful foreign policies of which the media, busily stirring up storms in teacups, seems blissfully unaware.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Crème caramel

Ingredients:

1 litre whole milk
2 cups castor sugar
7 eggs (whole)
4 packets vanilla powder
1/4 cup water

Method:

Melt one cup of sugar in a saucepan until it turns dark brown and bubbles. Remove from heat and add water instantly whilst covering saucepan with a lid. Remove after a few seconds. Stir the caramel sauce with a spoon and pour into the mould. Move the mould to and fro until you coat it totally to the brim. Keep doing this until the sauce thickens and the mould is better coated. Beat the eggs *and the vanilla vigorously in a large* heat-resistant bowl. Add the second cup of sugar to the milk and bring it to a boil. As soon as it boils, pour into the beaten eggs while beating with an electric beater on high speed, lest the eggs should harden. Continue beating until both milk and eggs blend well together. Pour into the coated mould. Cover with a tight lid. Put the mould in a large pan filled with boiling water, allowing three quarters of the mould to be immersed in this water. Cover the pan and leave the crème caramel to cook and thicken. This method is called *bain Marie*. Half an hour later, uncover pan and mould. Insert the tip of a knife in the mould. If it comes out unstained, then the crème caramel is done. If not, leave it for five more minutes and repeat. Remove from pan. Allow to cool off, then refrigerate. Turn it upside down in a serving plate and serve chilled.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Compare and contrast

Andrew Steele takes a Tuscan tryst

One hates to be proven wrong, and after having brazenly declared that La Mamma at the Cairo Sheraton was the best Italian restaurant in Cairo, I thought it best that I cover my tracks by investigating the various merits of several other notables. Well, one, in any case. The newish Tuscan Ristorante at the Marriott to be precise, and be warned, you'll need to book. As one approaches the space that Tuscan shares with a hearty steak restaurant, one is confronted by a startling take on a (Tuscan?) courtyard, complete with inconsiderately positioned, less than living trees, which require careful dodging. This serves as an anteroom for the two establishments, where one can sit if one is early and admire the trees.

My guest soon arrived and we were *ushered by the comely receptionist* to our table. Dim are the lights and plush the surroundings. This place has the air of being an entirely serious restaurant where cooking is elevated to art form and the ingredients often outlandish. Not quite the case here, as we shall see, but 'hip hip hoorah' for the interior design team at least.

First came the menus. These were unfortunately gimmicky and a bit naff. Heavy wooden clip boards with a plastic fork serving as the clip. They were more than a trifle *fiddly too*. The fare, to be fair, sounded promising, comparing favourably to that of La Mamma, outdoing it, even on the pasta front. We chose *Zuppa Ai Funghi Di Bosco* and *Antipasto Misto* to begin. Meanwhile, a *wrought iron conical bread basket* arrived and our side plates were soused with olive oil, balsamic vinegar and parmesan cheese. The Marriott is known for its fine bread and the pickings here did not disappoint. Why, they were even Italian.

We mopped and munched. Full marks for originality. The soup was delicious, as was my *Anitipasto Misto*: marinated aubergines, artichokes, strips of cheeses. The gripe here is that it was somewhat of a minimalist plateful; indeed, the border of the plate was not full at all, and, with the rather *steep price tag of LE25*, it could certainly not be labeled good value.

The main courses were hit and miss. One hit, and one miss, in that order. The *Penne Ai Quattro Formaggio* was a good, simple dish of rather fine penne in a sauce that one could well believe was a heady mixture of four pungent cheeses. As all pasta and risotto dishes at Tuscan, it comes in half- and full-plate sizes. The full was a large shallow bowl, which my companion opined could well have been a bit deeper, so heavenly was the blend. My *Petto Di Pollo* sounded promising: chicken breasts, marinated in lemon and rosemary, pan fried and served with roast peppers and potatoes. The breasts were a trifle tough, and not a little stringy. The subtlety of the marinade was somewhat lost in the cooking. The potatoes, although few in number, were lip-smacking, but the pepper was under-roasted and lacking oil. Not a dish one would ever complain about, but lacking the sure-handed quality of the other delights. The bill was a rather unmodest LE165 for a, frankly, small dinner for two, with drinks and coffee. When dining Italian in Cairo, Mamma knows best.

Tuscan Ristorante at The Marriott, Guezira Street, Zamalek
Telephone 3408888 for reservations.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS

1. Limpid; bright as day (5)
6. Housebroken (4)
10. Knob or boss used as ornament (4)
14. Hastily (5)
15. Element; quantity; module (4)
16. Caution; be apprehensive (4)
17. Hand-picked (5)
18. Relieve; eject (9)
20. Weather directions (3)
21. Fetish; sacred cow (4)
23. Modify (5)
24. Autocrat (4)
25. Father; sovereign title (4)
27. Fish hawk (6)
30. Paper or kitchen tool (8)
34. Claw of bird of prey (5)
35. Flower; luxuriate (5)
36. 100th part of krone (3)
37. Ploy; pitfall (4)
38. Heretic sect in Christianity (5)
39. Accumulation (4)
40. Poetic for "even" (3)
41. Specialised leaf situated at base of flower (5)
42. Stanza; sonnet (5)
43. RSVP; feed-back (8)
45. Showy pretense (6)
46. God of love (4)
47. Broughams (4)
48. Gather; cull (4)
51. Voyage (4)
52. Occurrence (3)
55. Milder equivalent; figurative attenuation (9)
58. Previously (5)
60. Line of descent (4)
61. Progenitor of human race (4)
62. Diminish; dwindle (5)
63. Observed (4)
64. Cold Adriatic wind (4)
65. Be (5)

DOWN

1. Behind time (4)
2. Milky sap used for arrow poison (4)
3. Bakery item (4)
4. Freeze (3)
5. Inhabitant (7)
6. Name of British royal family (5)
7. Indigo plant (4)
8. Prefix denoting "ill" (3)
9. And so forth, abb. (3)
10. Ascended; flaked (6)
11. Caustic (4)
12. Induce; force along (4)
13. Forest animal (4)
19. Seraglio (5)
22. Time period (3)
24. Season's growth (4)
25. Young weaned pig (5)
26. Press (4)
27. Weasel-like aquatic mammal (5)
28. Indian dress (5)
29. Layouts; blueprints (5)
30. Cut through; portion (5)
31. Makers (5)
32. Cross out (5)
33. Push back (5)
35. Copper and zinc (5)
38. European river (4)
39. Layers (4)
41. Carried (5)
42. Quiver (7)
44. A fowl 96)
45. A Greek letter (3)
47. Punctuation mark (5)
48. Obtains (4)
49. Decoy; bewitch (4)
50. Dueling sword (4)
51. Var. of 24 Down (4)
52. N. Arizona tribe (4)
53. God of War (4)
54. Impudent (4)
56. Queen of fairies (3)
57. Matrimonial vows, 2 wds (3)
59. Telecommunications transmitting device (3)

Last week's solution

هكذا من الأصل

Alexandria and Maadi share gardens and villas, the memories of a more genteel past. Will the city and suburb also share a common fate?

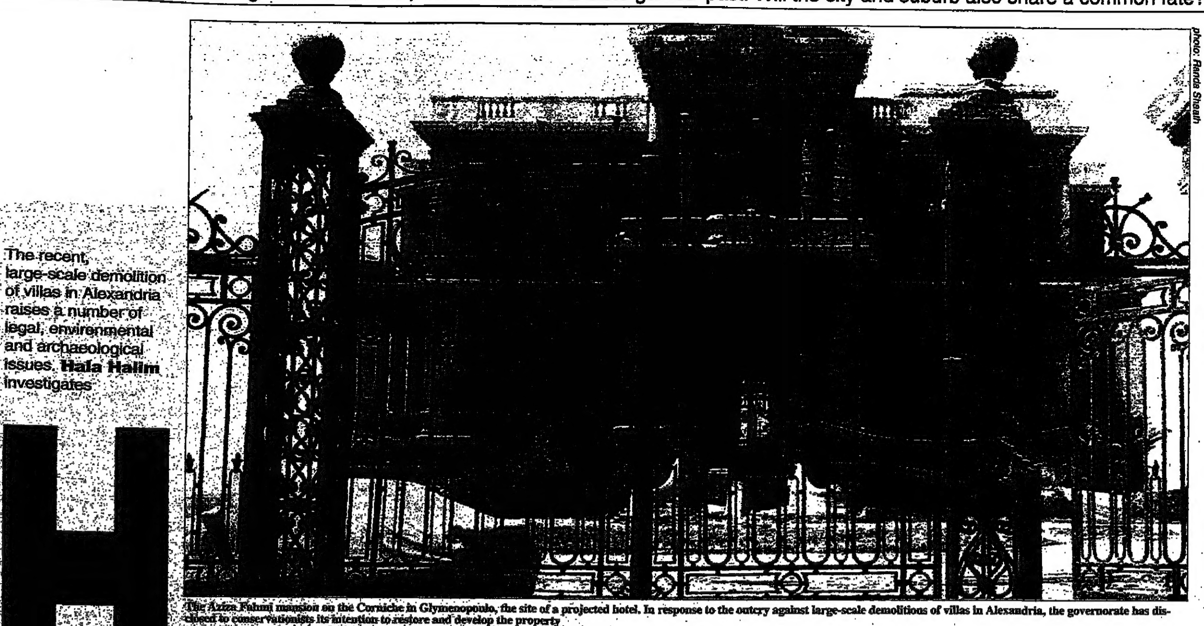


photo: Randa Shaath

The Aziza Fahmi mansion on the Corniche in Glymenopoulo, the site of a projected hotel. In response to the outcry against large-scale demolitions of villas in Alexandria, the governorate has disclosed to conservationists its intention to restore and develop the property

The recent, large-scale demolition of villas in Alexandria raises a number of legal, environmental and archaeological issues. **Hala Halim** investigates

House of cards

"Let us not cry over spilt milk," says professor of architecture Mustafa Sonbol, referring to the recent large-scale demolition of villas and old houses in Alexandria. We are sitting in the office of the secretary of Alexandria Governor Mohamed Abdel-Salam Mahgoub. Having refused to grant *Al-Ahram Weekly* an interview for three days, Mahgoub referred the request to Sonbol. However, Sonbol, by his own admission, is not in the governorate's employ. He "volunteers advice on conservation issues" by virtue of his "long experience in the field," his perspective as an Alexandrian, and his "long-standing friendship with the governor." As such, Sonbol is in no position to proffer official statements on the more controversial legal and environmental aspects of the governorate's decision to dole out demolition permits on villas.

The demolitions started last October, soon after Alexandria's new governor announced on local television Channel 5 that he has no objection to the demolition of villas that are not old, according to Adel Abu Zahra, head of the Friends of the Environment Association. True, the ban placed by the previous governor, Ismail El-Gawsaki, on villa demolition was not universally respected, and houses would still be illegally torn down at night. However, Mahgoub's municipal about-face prompted a furore among environmentalists, conservationists and concerned Alexandrians — many of whom had initially hailed him as a welcome replacement to El-Gawsaki's unpopular tenure.

Following the spate of demolitions, Abu Zahra wrote a letter to the editor of the daily *Al-Ahram* (27 October, 1997) where he argued that "building huge residential blocks in place of these villas will further burden a city that is already crammed and compound its complex environmental problems." He wrote that the housing blocks would disfigure "the beauty of the city and its distinctive character" and listed the various laws breached by these demolitions. Abu Zahra's letter to the editor, along with similar appeals to the governorate by preservation activist Mohamed Awad, appear to have put a halt to further demolitions.

"Most of the villas that have been demolished were not of architectural merit, it is just that they are part of the urban fabric of the city," says Awad, an Alexandria University professor of architecture and head of the Alexandria Preservation Trust.

Antiquities Law 117 of 1983 stipulates the preservation of *not only any* building over 100 years old, but also of any given edifice "of historical, scientific, religious, artistic or literary worth," regardless of its age. More recently, Prime-Ministerial Decree 3086 of 1996 specifically forbids villa demolitions in Cairo and Alexandria and warns that "punitive measures are to be taken immediately against anyone responsible for illegal permission, as well as any specialised official — regardless of his position and the administration for which he works — who proves lax in penalising a person responsible for such illegal permission."

In lieu of the governor of Alexandria, Sonbol says that "if any villas were recently demolished, they were condemned, unsafe villas," implying that as such, there was no breach of the law. Awad, on the other hand, counters that "I think the governor himself was not aware of [the prime-ministerial decree] when he was giving the permits; now he knows because he wrote to me and I wrote back and said 'Look here, you can't do that because there is this law.'"

Estimates of the number of villas demolished in recent months run from 60 to 100. Sonbol says he has no statistics for the demolition of what he insists were condemned buildings, and suggests that the person to speak to is Major-General Ahmed Ali, under-secretary of the Ministry of Housing in Alexandria.

Like Sonbol, the major-general denies that any villas that were safe for habitation were torn down recently. "No responsible person in a position of authority," says Ahmed Ali, "could breach Prime-Ministerial Decree 3086 of 1996, concerning Alexandria, and the decree of the governor concerning villas that are not condemned or even those that are condemned. Not one building has been demolished in violation of the above decrees." If villas were recently demolished, says Ali, then they would have been condemned ones, issued permits by the committee of condemned buildings in the district in which they are located.

The Eastern District of Alexandria covers a large portion of the city, from Sporting to Laurens, including Glymenopoulo where the governor's residence is located. More or less opposite the governor's mansion on Ahmed Yehia Pasha Street, is a wrought iron fence — a surviving testimonial of villa 16. Leila El-Kholi, head of the Department of Condemned Buildings in the Eastern District has no record of the villa in her files, nor can she cite the number of buildings in the district that were torn down in 1997 on grounds of safety. She suggests, however, that number 16 possibly went through the department of non-condemned buildings for its demolition permit.

In the latter department, an employee who spoke on condition of anonymity said that he has no record of number 16 Ahmed Yehia Pasha Street which may, therefore, have been illegally demolished. He discloses that the number of buildings — including villas — given demolition permits by his department in 1997, came to 27. These 27 buildings would have necessarily passed through the governorate and the representative of the Ministry of Housing in Alexandria.

A *fait accompli*, the recent demolitions nevertheless still raise some troublesome issues. Decree 3086 also states that a torn down villa can only be replaced by another villa or a building of equal height and dimension to the original structure. Whether Alexandria Governorate will stick to the letter of the law in this instance remains to be seen.

One villa-owner, Mrs Mohiba El-Nahhas, though she feels that houses with historical, architectural or cultural merit should be preserved, finds the drive to preserve indiscriminately all villas overblown. Referring to the dense high-rise residential blocks that now overlook her villa and the tendency of new neighbours to dump garbage in her garden, she says "I no longer enjoy living the way I live. Besides, villas usually belong to people who were at one point rich, but whose lands were *sequestered* and who have now reached a certain age and need the money."

Awad concedes that the laws are riddled with loopholes "and entangled with other problems like rent control and tenants' unions". He adds that there is "a serious problem regarding the listing of buildings... I have quite a list to start with, but nobody has asked me officially, until now, to present the list, to make it recognisable... It's got 1,500 buildings at least. It not only covers buildings, it also covers archaeological sites, areas, the Turkish Town, the natural environment — parks and so on."

Demolitions of buildings in modern Alexandria — large portions of which are built upon the ruins of older Alexandrias — allow for archaeological salvage excavations before the rebuilding begins. More often than not, however, while digging the foundations of a new building, entrepreneurs cover up any archaeological vestiges found so as not to incur delays, while portable artefacts later turn up in the Attarin antique market.

"Until now, we have not been called upon [by the Supreme Council of Antiquities] for excavations of sites of demolished villas, though I do hope the opportunity will arise," says archaeologist Jean-Yves Empereur, head of the Centre d'Etudes Alexandrines (CEA) which is responsible for several salvage excavations in the city, including the recent dig of the ancient Necropolis, that would have otherwise been destroyed in the process of construction of a fly-over.



Villa Austria, built in 1913: Maadi's villas and vegetation may soon succumb to the profit imperative — *photo: courtesy of Samir Raafat*

The demolition crew

Maadi, a green oasis in the cement wasteland that is Cairo? Activists fear that this may not be the case for very long. **Fatemah Farag** visits a new construction site

Dr Wagdi Ragheb, a Maadi resident since 1960, sadly gazes out of his window, at a sea of greenery interrupted by a tall white building. "About seven years ago, that space was a villa. It was torn down. Around me, three other villas have been replaced by high-rises," he complains.

Ragheb and his wife have decided not to take the encroachment lying down. "Until a few weeks ago, I was a helpless soul. Now I have joined the Tree Lovers' Association," says Ragheb with the fervour of a true convert. The association, a non-governmental body working within Maadi, has recently taken on what they describe as the "building tycoons" of Maadi, fighting for the implementation of building codes as well as prime ministerial decrees regarding zoning.

According to the regulations of the Maadi Construction Company, buildings in the area should not exceed four floors and should not use up over 50 per cent of each plot. Engineer Aziz Abul-Ela explains that "the problem which develops when you do not follow the code is an overload on the infrastructure. A plot intended for one villa with one family suddenly has a building with 20 families and 40 cars. The result is a shortage in electricity, water, and parking space and excess sewage."

To counter violations of building codes in upper-class areas, Prime Minister El-Ganzouri issued Decree 2104/1996 applying to Garden City, Zamalek and Maadi. The decree stipulated that demolished villas must be replaced by structures of the same size, no new commercial establishments may be opened and the height of new buildings must not exceed one and a half times the width of the street.

Contractors and property owners can evade these regulations in many ways. "People go to court and get general laws applied because the Maadi Company regulations are not as strong as the law," explains Abul-Ela.

He has been through the discouraging experience of the courts. "When my neighbour began to tear his house down and build a high-rise, I went to the municipality and found out that he had gotten a court order. The law does not stipulate the neighbours should be informed of the case, so I lost the chance of becoming a party to it. Anyway, I appealed and got a court order in my favour. The governorate came to pull the building down but they didn't have the proper equipment," he recounts. The owner then agreed to pull down the building himself. He made a show of doing so, according to Abul-Ela, but in the meantime appealed the demolition order on the grounds that the correct official had not signed it. The high rise now stands firmly in place.

Ragheb's wife thinks it is all a matter of speed. "Once the building is up and has people in it is considered a done deed. The courts take so long. In the building next to us we got a decision in our favour and the crane to pull it down was here, but the owner got some people — maybe not even the real owners — to sit in the flats and scream from the balconies. So the order was cancelled," she remembers.

Prices for apartments in Maadi Al-Sarayat range from LE800,000 to over a million, making the incentive to break the law and flout aesthetic and environmental considerations very strong. Further, fines on illegal extra floors have not been adjusted to match new real-estate values.

Contradictions between the prime ministerial decree and the law are also contributing to the rise of the skyscrapers. "Owners refer the matter back to the government and say, should we implement the law or the decree? Of course the law is more powerful," Ragheb explains.

Of course, the pollution created by the cement factories in nearby Helwan and Tora makes the activists' demands seem futile. Ragheb and others, however, counter that the pollution problem is too big. A simple solution would be to plant more trees — a step they are well-placed to take. The Association aims at furthering its cause by documenting misdemeanours, bringing the matter to the attention of the government and the press, and taking legal action.

Similar community groups have begun to sprout in Zamalek and Heliopolis, spurred by the deterioration of the quality of urban life and the government's apparent inability to take decisive action. Since these groups remain relatively small and depend on legal action as the backbone of their activity, however, their effectiveness remains questionable without an overhaul of the legal system.

Ragheb looks up at his two-storey house from the street and jokes, "Maybe I should just tear down my house and make a lot of money." He is not serious but, considering the twin onslaught of big business and apathy, he may be one of the very few who is not.

New role for tour guides

Tour guides have decided to take the initiative and promote tourism in Egypt themselves. This untraditional method is explored by Rehab Saad



Guides are used to dealing with foreigners, and now seek an active role in tourism promotion *photo: Khaled El-Fiqi*

Tourist guides, hit hard by the 17 November Luxor terrorist attack, have decided to take matters into their own hands. By taking an active role in promoting Egyptian tourism, they hope to lure travellers back to Egypt and encourage foreign tour operators to put Egypt back on their itineraries.

"The only way to solve our dilemma, since our livelihoods depend on tourism, is to do all we can to promote the industry," said Laila Qandeel, head of the Syndicate of Tourist Guides. The syndicate has decided to form a promotion committee, recognising that "tour guides are best qualified for promotion because they have fluency of language and first-hand experience at dealing with foreigners and describing the sites and history," Qandeel said.

"Some tourist guides have expressed a willingness to take part in the official promotional campaigns abroad; others are ready to go at their own expense. For example, some that specialise in French-speaking groups are ready to go to France at their own expense and guide visitors around the newly-opened Egyptian section of the Louvre for a whole month. They could take with them slides of Egypt in order to give illustrated lectures. Others, specialising in German, Italian, Spanish and other groups, have suggested the same thing in other countries," Qandeel said.

Another recent step is that guides are, for the first time, being represented on the Ministry of Tourism's promotion committee. "This is a very important step. Now we have a say in the decisions of this committee," Qandeel said. "The ministry is now encouraging guides to pursue a relationship with travel agencies and operators abroad. During the Christmas and New Year season, guides sent cards to all their contacts abroad. The Ministry of Tourism paid the costs," she said.

Reaction from the guides is enthusiastic. "This is particularly important for us," said Zeyad Anwar who specialises in German groups. "We have a personal relationship with people, not a business one like that of travel agencies." He explained that travel agencies have relationships with the tour operators abroad, not with individual travellers. "These tour operators, who have the upper hand in organising trips to Egypt, have no intention, at the present time, to promote Egypt in their countries. But the guides have direct relations with the tourists themselves and the tour leaders who come with the groups."

This distinction between roles of the tour operators, tour leaders, and Egyptian tourist guides is important. "I personally have excellent relationships with numerous tour leaders and, since the incident in Luxor, I have had telephone calls asking about the situation here. The general feeling is that tourism will pick up; maybe not this year or in the immediate future, but certainly soon. By maintaining contacts, we are keeping the ball rolling," Anwar said.

An English-speaking tourist guide, Mahmoud Khodeir, regularly travels abroad at his own expense, and feels that he is actively contributing to the promotion of Egypt. For example, last year he attended the Baptist Convention in the USA "and managed to sign up eight groups of tourists to Egypt. If this is the result of the efforts of a single tour guide, then, if similar travels could be sponsored by the government, there is no calculating the enormity of the returns in terms of tourists," he commented.

Khodeir feels that because such trips by individual tour guides are extremely costly, and cannot be performed on an annual basis, they should be financed by the government.

"This is an extremely wealthy clientele," Khodeir said. "The [Baptist] convention, for example, numbers some eight million persons, and if we could interest but one per cent to come to Egypt, this means 8,000 tourists from a single source!"

The US State Department's three-month travel advisory, warning tourists away from Egypt, will end in February. "Therefore, now is the time for tour guides to move," said guide Mohamed Farid. "Operators in the US are hesitant these days, so if Egyptian tour guides had an opportunity to talk to them on their own territory, and give them confidence to promote Egypt, we might encourage them to change their minds. We could give presentations and personally act as a link."

Some of the smaller travel agencies in the US plan to get together in order to consider how to promote Egypt abroad. Khodeir saw this as a good opportunity. "If tour guides attended this meeting, we could give them information on the latest developments and statistics about tourists who are continuing to come into the country. It would make a great deal of difference if an Egyptian, not an American, talked to them," he said.

There is yet another role that tourist guides could play during the current period, Qandeel said. "We have decided to address schools, clubs and universities to give lectures on the importance of tourism and promote a greater awareness of the country's attractions. Individual tour guides could perform this role. Many of the school teachers who take their classes on field trips are not qualified to explain adequately the history of the various places visited. Tour guides, with their natural ability to communicate in a friendly manner, would be ideal in the role," Qandeel explained.

All in one

THERE'S a new concept in travel and it's being tested on the Red Sea coast: integrated development. Hotel services, entertainment, sports and cultural activities are all situated in one place: everything from daily newspapers to hairdresser facilities.

"Such projects will lead both to a new tourist clientele and to the creation of stable productive communities in remote areas which will provide education and health services to labourers and their families," said Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui.

Rural attractions

THE MINISTRY of Rural Development is ready to cooperate with the Ministry of Tourism in promoting a new idea; travel to villages. There is definitely an increasing interest in life in the countryside and, according to Tourism Minister Mamdouh El-Beltagui, a number of selected villages will be chosen.

" This kind of tourism depends on the willingness of villagers to receive visitors, accessibility, and the village's ability to provide some essential services," said El-Beltagui. "I believe that they should be situated near historical sites."

Quality comes first

TOURISM officials and businessmen agree that the current period of tourist stagnation is a good opportunity to improve the quality of the product. "The time has come to implement all the commitments made verbally by hotels and Nile cruise operators to improve their services," said Tourism Minister Mamdouh El-Beltagui at a meeting with 25 managers of the Sonesta Hotel chain in Egypt.

"Tourists are definitely coming back to Egypt and we have to be ready," the minister said.

Security procedures

FAMILIARISATION trips will be encouraged these days, especially to countries which issued travel advisories to their citizens either banning them from travelling to some parts of Egypt or from visiting Egypt altogether.

"There is continuous demand for information on new security procedures. Our response has been to offer to host foreign tour operators, accompanied by their security experts, to investigate tourist sites for themselves and then issue their recommendations. We hope we can change their minds," Tourism Minister Mamdouh El-Beltagui said.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**

Mid-year holiday packages

With the approach of the mid-year holidays, hotels in Cairo, the Red Sea, Sinai, Luxor and Aswan are offering special prices for Egyptians and foreign residents. Here are some of the attractive deals:

Sharm El-Sheikh
Fayrouz and Residence Hilton hotels offer double rooms for LE110 including half board and taxes. Valid until the end of April.
Pyramisa offers double rooms for LE145 per person including buffet breakfast. The offer is valid until the end of April.

Aswan
Pyramisa hotel offers double rooms for LE125 per person including buffet breakfast. Valid until the end of April.

Luxor
Sheraton offers double rooms for LE80 per person including buffet breakfast. **Pyramisa Isis** offers double rooms for LE95 per person including buffet breakfast. Valid until the end of April.

Red Sea
Hilton Hurghada Resort and Hilton Plaza offer double rooms for LE110 per person including half board accommodation inclusive of taxes and service charge. Valid until the end of April.
Intercontinental hotel offers double rooms for LE151 per person inclusive of buffet breakfast and dinner inclusive of service charge and taxes. Single rooms are for LE250, while triple are for LE360. Valid between 2 and 15 February and subject to availability.
Windsor Zafarana offers rooms for LE135 per person on half board basis including service charge and taxes. The offer is valid till 6 March.

Ismailia
Hotel Mercure offers double rooms for LE125 per person including service charge and buffet breakfast and dinner.

Alexandria
Sofitel Cecil offers double rooms for LE90 per person including buffet breakfast, service and taxes.

Cairo
Pyramids Park Intercontinental global partner offers single and double rooms for LE140 including service charge and taxes.
Jolie Ville Mövenpick offers double rooms for LE99 per person including buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes.

Action on all fronts

Plans to promote Egypt abroad as a travel destination have never been so intense. Sherine Nasr looks into efforts by both government and tourism companies







Promotion of safaris, skin-diving and recreational tourism *photos: Sherif Sonbol, Khaled El-Fiqi*

Tourism companies and hotels, responding to the disastrous effects of last November's Luxor massacre on the industry, have joined hands with the Ministry of Tourism in a concerted campaign to promote Egypt as a travel destination.

Efforts by the Ministry of Tourism and now the private sector are more integrated than ever. "The best way to brighten Egypt's image abroad is to invite tour operators to Egypt in order to see conditions for themselves and make their own conclusions," said Mounir Wissa, sales and marketing director at Travco, a major tour company. "We have done this. We have also organised fun trips for guests from Germany, Holland, France, Belgium, the US and Australia. They visited Luxor and Aswan as well as the ancient quarters in Cairo and were left with a positive impression about the security measures that have now been taken. Most were inclined to continue promoting Egypt," and, he added, "This positive attitude has paid off immediately. More tourists have started to show up."

Apart from the fun trips, Travco is currently preparing a list of media people and tourist experts to visit Egypt. "Again, the idea is to record their experiences when they return," said Wissa.

Perhaps an even greater incentive to travel to the land of the Nile, especially for repeat visitors, is the substantial discounts on tourist itineraries, hotels and air fares. "We have offered tour operators trips at half price. And potential visitors can now make use of the 50 per cent discount on EgyptAir," Wissa said.

Many companies have agreed that their efforts will bear fruit only in the coming winter season, starting September, but efforts continue nevertheless. "At present, we are working with the French and British markets that should bring rapid response to our promotional efforts," said Ibrahim Hassabeddin of Spring Tours. Unlike Travco, this tourist company found it easier to send Egyptians on promotional missions abroad. "We have experts in the German, French, British, Russian and Hungarian markets. To each of these destinations we sent a representative with special offers including a 50 per cent discount on a variety of programmes," said Hassabeddin.

"Egypt is a destination which is hard to compete with," said Wissa. However, while tour operators might be willing to sell Egypt, there is little they can do so long as advisories are issued by some governments to their nationals not to come to Egypt or caution them if they want to visit. "We have to wait until the unfortunate incident [the 17 November Luxor tourist massacre] fades from memory," he added.

Other major tourist companies promoting Egypt are more reserved in their campaigns. "We are afraid that if we push too hard we will lose our clients forever; we need to be very careful in carrying out promotional activities abroad," was the opinion of Elhami El-Zayyat, general director of Emeco and head of the Egyptian Chamber of Travel Agencies.

Reactions to the Luxor attack, in which 58 foreign tourists and four Egyptians were killed, differed from one country to the other. El-Zayyat, who is also a member of the Higher Committee of Promotion formed by the Ministry of Tourism to contain the negative aspect of the past few months, feels that "different techniques need to be adopted for each market. We have to approach Japanese and German tour operators very carefully; they were most affected by the tragedy. But we can deal with the French and Italian markets aggressively because they have been the most understanding and sympathetic regarding the Luxor episode," he said.

Needless to say, no matter how active the promotion, results will only be felt next winter. Meanwhile, full attention is being given to the Arab countries that are expected to bring forth the biggest number of tourists in the interim: during the mid-year vacation and the summer season. "We are doing all we can to have Egypt included in brochures for the coming season, due to be printed by next May," El-Zayyat said.

A major promotional step would undoubtedly be to assure tour operators that their clients would be insured. The issue is being seriously considered by the government and tourist-related organisations for the first time and at every level. El-Zayyat said that tour operators in Europe are becoming "increasingly concerned about the growing 'Americanised' attitude of their clients who sue the company for anything that might go wrong during the trip." They are willing to sell Egypt but are afraid to do so. "By insuring their clients, their fears would be less," he commented.

Some of Egypt's travel destinations have been affected little by the events in Luxor. "Sinai and the Red Sea coasts, for example, are now being sold as a package since they are seen to be destinations that stand alone," said El-Zayyat, adding that some types of tourism will be able to recover more quickly than others. "Visitors on health tours and safaris are coming in greater numbers than those on cultural trips, for example," he said.

Misr Travel, the biggest national tourist company, is actively marketing Egypt through its offices in the UK, Germany, France, Sweden and Australia. The company has distributed brochures to encourage tourists to re-explore the Egyptian oases or visit newly developed areas along the Red Sea coast. "We are underlining untraditional sites and providing more creative programmes," said Misr Travel Chairman Mohamed Hussein. "We also have been closely collaborating with the Ministry of Tourism."

"Our aim was to cut down costs rather than quality service so that more tourists would be encouraged to visit Egypt," said Nazmi Youssef, public relations manager of Misr Travel, adding that the company had managed to "get the best deals possible from international carriers flying to Egypt."

It's action on all fronts.

No bed of roses

Sixteen nations will be taking part in the African Nations Cup, the continent's most prestigious soccer event, when it kicks off in Burkina Faso on Saturday. Inas Mazhar dusts off the history books — and gazes into her crystal ball

The African Nations Cup, which is now entering its 41st year, began in 1957 in Sudan. In the first ever final, held on 15 February that year, Egypt crashed Ethiopia 4-0 — all the goals were scored by Eldiba — and carried off the Abdel-Aziz Abdallah Salem trophy.

Since then, Egypt have competed in a record 15 Cup finals, and have won the tournament three times — in 1957, 1959 and 1986.

The second African Nations Cup was held in Cairo in 1959. The tournament ran from 22 to 29 May at the Ahli stadium. Three countries took part in the competition — Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. On May 22, Egypt again beat Ethiopia 4-0, three of the goals being scored by the man who is today head coach of the national team, Mahmoud El-Gohari. The final was played between Egypt and Sudan, with the home team winning 2-1, thanks to a last-minute comeback.

In January 1962 in Ethiopia, the Egyptians were this time runners-up to the organisers Ethiopia, who beat them 4-2 in an exciting final.

In the fourth edition in 1963, Egypt was eliminated in the second round, failing to qualify for the semi-finals after trailing Sudan on goal difference.

In the fifth edition in November 1965, Egypt withdrew from the competition for political reasons.

Cairo organised the ninth edition of the competition in 1974. Egypt again failed to reach the finals, but managed to defeat Congo 4-0 to take third place. For the first time in the history of the African Nations Cup, the final match between Zaire and Zambia had to go to a replay, because penalty shoot-outs were not yet used to settle a draw. The first final was played on 12 March, when the two teams drew 2-2. Zaire went on to win the cup the following day after beating Zambia.

It was the early 80s before the Egyptian team was strong enough again to make it to the finals. In 1984 in Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt came close, playing Nigeria in the semi-finals. But after leading 2-0, Egypt lost the lead when Nigeria drew level, sending the match to penalties. Nigeria went through, and a disappointed Egypt went on to come fourth, after losing 3-1 to Algeria.

Egypt were again the organisers when they won the African Nations Cup in 1986, under their Welsh head coach Michael Smith. There were now two groups, who played their matches in Cairo and Alexandria respectively. Egypt defeated Morocco in the semi-finals 1-0, thanks to a strong free kick by the illustrious Taher Abou-Zeid that went straight into the back of the Moroccan net. In the finals, they met the title-holders, Cameroon. At full time, the score was still 0-0, and the stalemate continued through extra time. Egypt eventually carried off the cup for the third time on penalties.

By the late eighties, the standard of Egyptian football had begun to deteriorate again. Since then, reaching the semi-finals or even the quarter-finals has been only a wild dream for Egyptian teams and their supporters. Elimination during the first or second rounds has become something of a national habit.

In Morocco 1988, Egypt was eliminated in the first round, though the team was still training with Smith who had previously wrought such wonders. Egypt was placed third in its group, after losing 3-0 to Nigeria, 1-0 to Cameroon and drawing 0-0 with Nigeria.

In 1990, Egypt were busy preparing for the World Cup in Italy with head coach Mahmoud El-Gohari, and so they sent the Olympic team to Algeria under head coach Hani Moustafa, instead of the first national team. This young team, lacking in experience, was easily eliminated by the old hands during the first round, when it came bottom of its group, losing all its matches, whether against Côte d'Ivoire (3-1), Nigeria (1-0) or the host nation themselves (a spectacular 12-0 overhanling).

In Senegal in 1992, Egypt was again eliminated in the first round, coming third in its group. This time there were no excuses to hide behind. The team had trained with head coach El-Gohari, who had returned to his post after quitting in the aftermath of the 1990 World Cup. Egypt lost 1-0 to both Ghana and Zambia.

In Tunisia in 1994, luck was on our side, for this time we had to wait till the second round to be eliminated, after losing 1-0 to Mali. The 1994 team was trained by Taha Ismail and Farouq Gafaar.

In the last African Nations Cup in Johannesburg in 1996, Egypt were again eliminated in the second round, losing 3-1 to Zambia.

The road to Burkina Faso, therefore, has been no bed of roses for Egypt, as all those involved — players, officials, fans and journalists — recognise only too well. No one can be unaware that we are facing a critical situation, especially after El-Gohari announced a couple of months ago that he is not optimistic about the team's likely performance and cannot promise more than 13th place. Doubtless he would say the same today, after a series of uneven results in warm-up matches in December and January.

Egyptian fans are among the most fanatical in the world and demand continual success. They know their national passion is in peril. The Egyptian team have not delivered of late, and will be under much pressure to do so in Burkina Faso. Failure to qualify for the World Cup in France in 1998 was, for many, the last straw. Those who are not completely desperate are now looking to the African Nations Cup for compensation. However, we only barely qualified for the finals in Burkina Faso, through a series of confused, shaky, and unpredictable games. Now a certain degree of scepticism about the immediate future seems not just legitimate, but highly recommended.

Highlights from Egypt's preparations

*During the past year, the national team has played 24 international matches: 12 official games in both the African Nations and World Cup qualifications, and 12 friendly games.
*They won ten of the 24 matches, including five of the official matches. Drew seven, four of which were friendly, and lost seven, four of them official.
*Forty-two players joined the national squad during Khatib-Gafaar's reign, and 60 more under El-Gohari.
*Superstar striker Hossam Hassan comes top of the table of player-participation, having played 18 games, followed by twin brother Ibrahim and defender Mohamed Youssef with 17, Medhat Abdel-Hadi on 16, and Ahmed Hassan and Tarek Moustafa on 15.
*In Thailand last week, the team participated in a four-nation tournament with Denmark, Korea, and their hosts. Egypt was runner-up to Korea, after losing 5-4 on penalties.

"Our final preparations for the African Championship were not executed as they had been planned. Lack of money was the main reason. However, we hope that after this series of friendly and official games, we will be in a stronger position," said head coach Mahmoud El-Gohari.

President of the Egyptian Football Association Samir Zaher struck a more positive note, claiming that the team's performance in Thailand last week revealed that it has improved and is making progress. He added that he is also optimistic that the team would make it to the second round, and maybe even the quarter-finals. Egypt will play in group D with Morocco, Zambia, and Mozambique.

A bit of a do in Ouagadougou

When the Snakes lie down with the Lions and the Brave Warriors have to bite the Bullet, it can mean only one thing — the 1998 African Nations Cup has come to town. We profile the fifteen *other* teams who'll be giving each other hell in the first round

Group A

Algeria: The former one-time champions of 1990 view the African Nations Cup as a chance to salvage something of their pride following their exit from the World Cup. *The Desert Warriors*, with only two professional players in Europe, have chalked up two away wins over Egypt and Tanzania in their preparations for Burkina Faso.
Top scorers: Ali Messabih, Moussa Saib (captain and lone survivor from the 1990 team)
Coach: Abdel-Rahman Mehdi.

Burkina Faso: The hosts of the 21st edition have been battered and wounded on their way to the competition. *The Stallions* went through a period when they lost every match they played in their qualifications for the World Cup, which led to their Bulgarian coach being sacked, as well as ending the career of several experienced veteran players. This will be their third appearance for the Burkinabe.
Top scorer: Mamadou Zongo.
Coach: Frenchman Philippe Troussier

Cameroon: The *Indomitable Lions* have qualified for the World Cup, and will be treating this tournament as a perfect opportunity to prepare for this summer's competition in France. The Nations Cup is also a chance for the two-times champions to return to form after the obvious deterioration in the team's recent results.
Top scorers: Patrick Mboma, Pierre Nlend Wome.
Coach: Jean Manga Onguene.

Guinea: They were early casualties on their last appearance in 1994, when they failed to qualify for the second round. They have made it twice to the finals, where they were runners up. But this was in their golden age, when they were a strong force in African football. Now with new talented players, they hope to regain their lost glory. They made it easily enough to the final stage in Burkina Faso, after the withdrawal of their qualifying group opponents, Sierra Leone and Central Africa.
Top scorer: Aboubacr Titi Camara, Maorlay Soumah

Group B:

Congo: Still recovering from the civil war that has changed the national structure of their football, as well as giving the team new colours, the Congolese are determined to prove their ability and potential. This will be their first appearance as Congo DR, after previously playing as Zaire, under which name they won the cup in '68 and '74.
Top scorer: Etienne Nsunda, Ekanza Simba.
Coach: Pierre Kalala.

Ghana: They have the best record of all, having won the Nations Cup four times, in '63, '65, '78, and '82. They have also been runners-up on several other occasions. *The Black Stars* are determined to win the title for a fifth time, to make up for missing the boat to France.
Top scorers: Abedi Pele, Peter Oforo Quaye

Togo: Outsiders Togo make their third appearance in the Nations Cup this year. *The Eagles* failed to win a single match in the 1972 finals, as they did again in the Côte d'Ivoire 12 years later. Warm- up results have been largely unimpressive, with a seven-goal mauling from Egypt the low point, and a one-goal victory over Algeria in neutral Cairo the highlight.
Top scorer: Bachirou Salou, Komalan Assignon
Coach: German Eberhard Vogel.

Tunisia: The 1996 runners-up are seen as potential winners, specially after their recent rise to glory. The Tunisians have participated in seven previous editions. They hosted the event in '65, but unfortunately were runners-up at home.
Top scorers: Riadh Jelassi, Eskander Souayeh
Coach : Polish Henri Kasperczak.

Group C:

Angola: It would be easy to dismiss the chances of Angola, considering that on the one previous occasion when they qualified, they failed to win a single match. But *The Black Impalas* are progressing rapidly, especially now that most of the team play with top Portuguese teams. They come to Burkina Faso carrying the hopes of a nation where basketball is the most popular sport.
Top scorer: Paulo Maieco.
Coach: Portuguese Manuel Gomes.

Côte d'Ivoire: No visiting team will feel more at home in Burkina Faso than their neighbours and former champions. Luck was on the side of *The Elephants* when they were drawn to play at the Omnisport stadium in Booboo-Dioulasso — which is much closer to the border with their homeland than the other venues.
Top scorers: Joel Tiehi, Ibrahim Babayoko.
Coach: Frenchman Robert Nouzaret.

Namibia: No delusions of grandeur here, as Namibia prepare to compete in the Cup finals for the first time. *The Brave Warriors* are ranked so low that they had to play a pre-qualifier against Botswana. They are now the outsiders in a pool containing two-times champions Cameroon, Gabon and Kenya. They have no stars, yet they forge tirelessly ahead and refuse to accept defeat until the final whistle sounds.
Top scorers: Congo Hindjou, Ruben van Wyk
Coach: Reston Mogane.

South Africa: The defending champions are desperate to end a six-match run without a win. Most South Africans speak of reaching the semi-finals, but faced with rapidly-improving Angola, revitalised Côte d'Ivoire (and Namibia) in group C, *The Bafana Bafana* face a few difficult first-round hurdles.
Top scorers : Benny McCarthy, Hans Vonk
Coach: Jamo Sono

Group D

Zambia: Zambia detest being known as the greatest team never to have won the African Nations Cup. This year they believe a touch of German steel may finally help them secure the ultimate prize. The draw did Zambia few favours, placing them in group D, which some original commentators are already referring to as the Group of Death, along with pre-competition favourites Morocco, three-time champions Egypt and Mozambique. *The Bullet* will be making their ninth appearance in this year's event.
Top scorers: Frazier Kamwandi, Tenant Chilonbo, Dennis Lota
Coach: German Burkhard Ziese

Morocco: *The Lions of the Atlas* have represented Africa at the World Cup a record four times, yet have made little impact on the Nations Cup with just one title to boast of. That came in Ethiopia 25 years ago and the best the Moroccans have done since are fourth places in '86 and '88, when they hosted the biennial tournament. Despite being drawn in Group D for Death (don't forget!), they are favourites not only to reach the knockout stages, but to collect the cup.
Top scorers: Salaheddine Bassir, Said Shiba, Ahmed Bahja
Coach: Frenchman Henri Michel

Mozambique: *The Snakes* enter the African Nations Cup finals for the third time, knowing their chances of ending a dismal record are thinner than a thread. Despite being an impoverished nation still recovering from civil war, the football authorities have spared no effort to ensure the team is adequately prepared for their mammoth task. They have played five warm-up matches in West Africa this month in preparation for the tournament.
Top scorers: Manuel Bucuane, Chiquinho Conde.
Coach: Arnaldo Salvado

Compiled from AFP



Mahmoud El-Gohari, Egypt's technical manager won a Nations Cup title as a player...Can he do it as a coach with this current team? "If I win as coach at this tournament, I'll be the first to do the player-coach double," he told the *Weekly*. Go for it, Gohari!

Teen players... teen winners

LAST WEEK, the close of the Australian Tennis Open was marked by a major breakthrough for rising teenage stars. While world no.1 Martina Hingis was celebrating her second victory in the toughest tournament of the four Grand Slam titles, Peter Korda of the Czech Republic was claiming the first Grand Slam title of his career.

Hingis beat Conchita Martinez of Spain 6-3, 6-3 over 84 minutes in very hot weather on the main court in Melbourne. She thus became the youngest player ever to retain a Grand Slam title. She is now set for a determined effort to win all four majors this year. But she is also quite aware of the threat from Seles and Graf, who have been sidelined so far by personal and injury problems. The 17-year-old Swiss champion had been wanting to watch her favourite three pm TV show for the past two weeks, but the time difference meant it would have kept her up too late. So she celebrated her Australian Open triumph at a special private showing of *Titanic* at a Melbourne casino, organised for Hingis and her friends the night after her straight sets victory over her Spanish rival.

Korda of the Czech Republic had meanwhile routed Marcelo Rios of Chile 6-2, 6-2, 6-2 to claim his first Grand Slam title. The 30-year-old number six seed won the match in one hour and 25 minutes, one of the shortest victories in Grand Slam history. Rios seemed devoid of ideas throughout the match and was unable to counter Korda's attacking game. Korda, now in his 14th year on the circuit and the defeated finalist in the 1992 French Open, acknowledged his long wait for a major title. The victory marked a stunning comeback by the Czech after a number of operations in 1995 and 1996 nearly forced him to quit tennis. After sealing the victory, Korda sank down on his knees as if to pray, then threw his racquet into the crowd and did a cartwheel before he finally shook Rios's hand. He then climbed into the players' box and hugged his coach Ivo Werner, his wife and his daughter. The victory should move Korda from number seven in the world rankings to number two, just behind Pete Sampras of the United States, who was beaten in the quarterfinals.

Earlier, Venus Williams and Justin Gimelstob of the United States beat the Czech brother and sister team of Cyril Suk and Helena Sukova 6-2, 6-1 in the mixed doubles final. It was the first major title for the 17-year-old Williams, who is already being touted as a big star of the future. In addition to the women's singles crown, Hingis also won the women's doubles, playing alongside 15-year-old Croat Mirjana Lucic.

A challenging start

The first week of the national cup promises a tightly-fought competition, even if Ahli did show signs of doing it again... Abeer Anwar tries to be objective

Ahli, the current league leader, certainly seem to be intent on adding the Egypt cup to their trophy cabinet this year, judging from the way they played the opening match of the tournament. They celebrated *Eid* and entertained their fans by beating Nasr City's Iskan 5-0. The five goals were a fine *eidiya* (present) for their fans who had gathered at the Cairo Stadium. Perhaps if Tyneside converted *en masse* to Islam, Kenny Dalglish would be able to get his boys to start scoring goals again too.

Of course, having someone like Iskan to play against helps (though what is the English equivalent of Iskan, if not Stevenage Borough?). Ahli's reputation seemed to intimidate the Iskan players. From the first minute of the match, they all piled back into defence, crowding in front of the net in the hope of keeping a clean sheet. Ahli, on the other hand, appeared very relaxed, though not on top form. For the first 10 minutes of the first half, they had no trouble getting through clear on target, but were unable to score. It was left to Walid Salaheddin to break the spell. His goal not only paved the way for the four that were to follow, but for a magnificent afternoon for him personally, as he went on to score Ahli's second goal in the 16th minute of the first half, and make the third goal in the 41st minute, when Ahmed Koshri converted his well-judged header. In the second half, Iskan abandoned defence in a desperate attempt to save something from the match, but in vain. Salaheddin was about to score again when Iskan's goalkeeper, Yasser Eid, could find no way to stop him save through a rather vigorous tackle. The referee gave a penalty, from which Reda Abdel- 'Al was able to make it four. The fifth and final goal of the match fell to Ahmed Salah Hassan shortly afterwards.

Commenting on the match, Thabet El-Batal, Ahli's manager, said, "Although we won 5-0, I am still not satisfied with the team's performance. They could play better than this, but they were over-confident, because they knew Iskan would be easy prey."

On the other hand, the Zamalek-Muqawloon match was an excellent one on both sides. The teams were well-matched and they both fought to win, only to draw 1-1. Muqawloon controlled the game during the first half, which ended 1-0 in their favour. The goal was scored by Saad Abdel-Baqi in the 46th minute. In the second half, Zamalek dominated the play, and were able to equalise in the 23rd minute through Abdel-Hamid Bassiouni. It was a fast-moving match, as the technical managers of both teams had brought in many new players and juniors. As a result, the field was full of enthusiastic talented youngsters eager to prove themselves. The average age of the two teams did not exceed 21.

After the match, Ruud Kroll, Zamalek's manager, commented, "The team's performance was affected by the number of injured players, but still, I am happy with the result." Muqawloon's Joseph Berger said, "I am happy that the players were able to regain some psychological balance after the death of their teammate Sayed Abdel-Gaber."

As for the weekend's other matches, Shams drew with Bassioun 0-0, Suez beat El-Rebat 2-0, Gazel El-Suez beat El-Sharq Insurance 2-0, Maaden drew with Gazel El-Mahala 0-0, Mansoura with Aswan 1-1, Beni Sueif with Marikh 1-1, Masri beat Aluminium 1-0, Ismaili beat Electricity 4-0, Nabarou beat Baladiat El-Mahala 2-1, Qena beat Masroub 1-0, Dina drew with Koroum 1-1 and Alexandria's Ittihad drew with Port Fouad 1-1.

Al-Ahram Weekly

5 - 11 February 1998













photos: Mohamed Hegazi

Nassir Shama:

String and ligament

For those who still harbour images of the lute player as a benevolent older gentleman who rests his instrument on his pot belly before extracting a few sobs to showcase the singer's voice, a shock is at hand

Nassir Shama strides into the cafeteria of the five-star hotel where he is staying during his tour. He is young, tall, almost painfully slim, and with a slightly incongruous, young-executive-on-holiday air about him. He is dressed in an open black shirt and blazer, no tie. "Classy beatnik", quips a young reporter. He seems too savvy by half. Certainly, he is articulate: far too articulate for a musician, one is tempted to think. He will speak with the passion of a Sufi about his *oud* and the trance that is a concert. But that is later.

For now, he moves with an entourage of efficient young men whose main task seems to be organising his time. Someone is late and his whole schedule is out of sync; he is not too happy about the number of interviews lined up for today, but he remains exquisitely polite. "This tour," he says, "has a political as well as an artistic dimension." He came to Egypt with the humanitarian mission made up of Egyptian cultural luminaries who were recently in Iraq, and is here to talk about the plight of Iraqi children, who are suffering the effects of eight years of UN sanctions.

He has been living in Tunis since 1993, where he teaches at the Institute of Arabic Music. He was eager to accompany the Egyptian mission to Baghdad, because Iraq's fate is his own. Moreover, he never misses an opportunity to play to refugees and war victims and often goes on tours organised by Médecins sans Frontières.

This introduction has something of the PR spiel about it; but as the conversation turns toward Arabic music, Nassir Shama straightens his gaunt frame. His hands move more rapidly, and he grows both more abstract and somehow more anguished. It no longer matters who is listening: he may have said it a thousand times before, but he is tapping into something that is always there. "The Arab world," he says, "is beginning to realise that whatever hurts one country in the region is painful to the others." He trusts that music can bridge the gaps, sweeten the bitterness. "Music," says Nassir Shama, "can work wonders in creating a deeper understanding of various civilisations which may be alien on the surface. It is a tool of communication far superior to languages, because it is not bound by traditional barriers such as religion and nationality. Music is not static in form; it moves, changes, explores uncharted avenues, and is thus the perfect means to propagate new ideas which, though still linked to our heritage, have the potential to reach beyond it."

Shama launches into a comparison between the traditional lute, commonly used in Egypt, and the instrument he perfected a few years ago with a friend. Shama bought his first lute from Mohamed Fadel, the greatest lute craftsman in Iraq, but had it made to his own specifications. It is not until he started work on the "perfect lute" with Fadel's son, however, that he was able to formulate precisely what he expected from the instrument. "It is all in the wood," he says. "The choice of wood is of the utmost importance. Its quality, the way it has dried; the wood used for a lute should be at least 30 years old. Crafting a lute is a difficult art to which not enough attention is usually paid. All these instruments adorned with mother-of-pearl and miscellaneous decorations are an insult to the lute, soiling its purity." He and Fadel's son experimented with different woods, different qualities of glues and glueing techniques. They also altered the curve of the instrument several times. They had been making a lute a week for over a year when they felt they had finally reached perfection. "In the end, we managed to produce a lute which could withstand the violence with which I sometimes play."

From his concerts, or even recordings of his performances, it is clear that Shama is not talking about the lute familiar to most as a background instrument, accompanying the singer in black-and-white films, or as the means by which young men with an artistic bent lighten up a party with poor imitations of Sheikh Imam or Mekkawi.

Watching Shama's eyes light up, his hands plucking an imaginary lute out of thin air, one is even loath to mention Farid Al-Atrash. Shama, however, does acknowledge Umm Kalthoum's profound influence on the evolution of his own musical sensitivity. Her music inspired him from childhood. There are several Umm Kalthoum cafés in Iraq, and recordings of the Grande Dame's concerts are sold everywhere. She is the epitome of what the human voice can achieve, but she also embodied Arab unity. Nassir Shama clenches long, fluid fingers and leans forward, his thin frame tense as he searches for adequate words. "She was the treasure all the Arabs shared. The fact that she belonged specifically to Egypt seemed right, because all the Arabs looked to Egypt." When Umm Kalthoum disappeared, the lights went out, and they have not been turned on since.

Yet the lute can sing like the most beautiful human voice. It can, if he is playing. His most recent recording, pure as a concert ("better than a CD," murmurs one of the young men, checking the schedule for the tenth time), includes the dialogue of two birds in a tree. If one was not too busy searching for the birds, one would be mesmerised by the virtuosity of the player. It is not just hard, cold technique: there is a hypnotic emotion here. Dare one say it? Something like soul.

Shama was born in Kut, in southern Iraq, in 1963. He started playing the lute when he was 12 — quite late for a serious lute player; today he is one of the youngest professionals in Iraq. This passionate affair began fairly innocuously, with the school anthem. Seeing the music teacher playing it on the lute every morning, he felt the instrument beckoning. The teacher guided his fingers through their first bewildering steps on the deceptively simple strings, and gave him his first lute. This was not a hobby like the others he had taken up and abandoned. The lute bore no infidelities.

"The moment I held it in my arms, I felt myself conform to its shape. I felt that when I plucked the strings, they echoed in my body." He was sent to Baghdad to audition at the Music Institute. When he graduated from school he enrolled at once. His family was more given to religion ("and sports") than to melody, but they did not oppose his vocation. A divine gift? Shama was still not satisfied. He looked up from his lute and gazed into the horizon, certain that he could see uncharted territory. He delved into the poetry, songs, musical instruments and techniques of Mesopotamia and Babylon, searching for echoes of the lute. Travelling around the world to find rare works on musicology, he discovered a thousand-year-old manuscript by Al-Farabi in Ireland. From it he drew inspiration to make a lute with eight strings (instead of the traditional six) which is able to reproduce with precision the tessitura of the human voice.

The sources of Shama's inspirations are many and varied. If one detects the unmistakable echoes of flamenco, this is the baggage the Arabs brought with them after their expulsion from Spain. Music was the perfect vehicle through which this influence could be integrated into Arab traditions of scansion and narration.

One of Shama's heroes is undoubtedly Umm Kalthoum's lute player, the adulated composer Mohamed El-Qasabgui. More importantly, however, he acknowledges the influence of Sherif Muhieddin Haydar, the Iraqi lute master who made the Iraqi lute his own at the beginning of the century, and whose two disciples, Jamil and Mounir Bashir founded the modern Iraqi lute school. Shama studied under Mounir Bashir and became the director of his school. He considers Jamil his real spiritual master, however; although he readily names Mounir as the greatest Iraqi lute player — the best in the world, he insists — there is a basic difference: "Unlike most traditional lute players, I do not improvise. I create a scenario. Although I never look at my notes while I play, I write it all down, because the message I want to convey or the topic I am addressing are an inherent part of my music." A dialogue between the great classical Arab poet Al-Mutanabbi, and Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab, the Iraqi poet who championed the movement of modern Arab poetry and free verse in the '40s, is a typical theme.

His music may serve other purposes, too. Shama was a soldier in the Iraqi army during the Gulf War. He was lucky to come back unhurt. Just after the war, during one of his concerts in Baghdad, he saw a young man crying in the audience. When the concert was over, Shama went to greet him. The young man extended his left hand; he had lost the other arm. "I love the lute," he told Shama, "but I can no longer play." Shama asked him to attend his next concert. "I will play with my left hand only," he told him, "and dedicate my music to you." Shama, true to his word, wrote several pieces, thinking of the walking wounded.

As a young musician cradling his first lute, Shama felt it reverberate throughout his own, almost transparent, frame — "as if it was my very heart". He could feel the music in his rib cage before it emerged from the *oud* itself. After the war, he began to see it as an instrument which could serve as the extension of the body. For the walking wounded, the lute could give voice to missing limbs: fingers or even arms.

The lute is often overlooked or played commercially, having been synthesised or replaced by other, more modern or Western substitutes. More importantly perhaps, the human voice has acquired a new preponderance. In Iraq, the lute is a symbol of Arab nationalism, its sounds taken beyond their ordinary frontiers to express a whole range of feelings. Shama in concert has prompted these words from a music critic: "His music can become merry or sober, sad or playful, light or powerful, earnest or suggestive, soft or irascible... when he recounts the epics of Iraqi history, its mythology, the love of a queen or the martyrdom of Iraqi children."

Profile by **Fayza Hassan**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostries

♥ Darlings, I have just finished reading the proofs of *Al-Jurnalji*, the second tome of **Samir Sobhi**'s trilogy on the history of Egyptian journalism. *Al-Jurnal*, *Al-Jurnalji* and *Al-Jurnaljiya* (The Paper, The Newsman, and The Newsmen, for those of you not in the know). Unlike **Naguib Mahfouz**, **Samir**, who is our very own layout editor — when he is not engaged in researching and writing — is not that interested in ordinary people's lives. Titans are more in his line of work and (you may have guessed it) **Mohamed Hassanein Heikal**, the "quintessence of Egyptian journalism", as one of his admirers always refers to him, is his hero. There is more to come, of course: Samir is finishing the last tome of his mammoth work and I have it from reliable sources that it is going to be about all the distinguished editors-in-chief who graduated from the best journalism school there is — *Al-Ahram*, of course. I bet that our present *Al-Ahram* editor-in-chief, **Ibrahim Nafie**, will have pride of place in this volume.



♠ Having spent so much time concentrating on my reading, I needed a break and decided that some exercise was in order, so I joined my good friends from the Engineering Department of the Gezira Sheraton Hotel, who have been busy devising programmes to improve the standard of living in orphanages by repairing the buildings (among other things) for free. Donning my hot pink overalls and a little baseball cap, I followed **Keith Hardie**, the hotel acting general manager, financial controller **Mohamed Aref** and **Ayman Emeira**, director of engineering, who announced that we were in for some real action. This week, the accent was on colour: the rooms of several orphanages were painted with plenty of blues, reds, pinks and yellows. I love splashing around with a paintbrush, but when they asked me to do the ceilings, I had to draw the line. I am afraid of heights, after all. Nor was redoing bathrooms in my line of business, really. I just wanted to paint my own rainbows, dears, a little crooked, perhaps, but at least I made sure to include a pot of gold at each end.



♦ One of my favourite songstresses, **Gwen Perry**, is back in town, dears, and this time you can see her performing in a multilingual, one-woman recital at the Hanager Art Centre. Those of you who, like me, have followed Gwen on her minstrel's tour of Cairo's many chic nightspots know that Monday at Al-Hanager will be a night to remember.

